Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

JULY 1951
35¢
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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

July, 1951 Vol. 2, No. 4

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GALAXY *Science Fiction* is published monthly by World Editions, Inc. Main offices: 105 West 40th St., New York 18, N. Y. 35¢ per copy. Subscriptions: (12 copies) $3.50 per year in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions. Elsewhere $4.50. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Copyright, 1951, by World Editions, Inc. President: George A. Gogniat. Vice-President: Marco Lombi. Secretary and Treasurer: Anne Swereda. All rights, including translation, reserved. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction, and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental.

173

CONTENTS

NOVELETS

VENUS IS A MAN'S WORLD..... *by William Tenn* 3

APPOINTMENT IN TOMORROW..... *by Fritz Leiber* 134

SHORT STORIES

COMMON DENOMINATOR ..... *by John D. MacDonald* 21

SYNDROME JOHNNY..... *by Charles Dye* 30

PEN PAL..... *by Milton Lesser* 120

BOOK-LENGTH SERIAL—Conclusion

MARS CHILD ..... *by Cyril Judd* 44

FEATURES

EDITORIAL..... *by H. L. Gold* 1

GALAXY'S FIVE STAR SHELF..... *by Groff Conklin* 116

Next issue at your newsstand about July 15

Printed in the U. S. A. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

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Getting Personal

ONE of the most common requests from readers is for vital data on their favorite writers. Biography, though, should be mechanical, a suggestion that authoritarians ought to adopt gladly.

The trouble is that writers, like shoemakers, butchers, drug clerks, come in all sizes, shapes, ages, sexes, places of birth, education, marital status, number of begats.

This is sheer confusion. Anyone who served in the Army can tell you its great advantage over civilian life—at a single glance, you can tell a stranger's rank, branch, length of service, pay.

The trouble is that you can stand on the toes of your favorite writer in a bus, accidentally spill your soda over him at a bar, or refuse him credit, and not know who—or what, for that matter—he is. In a nice, ruthless authoritarian society, this wouldn't be true. Here's how it might work:

- *Uniform.* According to income, this should range from overalls to cutaway, which must be worn at all times except in privacy. Writers should wear traditional flowing ties and velvet jackets, topped off by a green eyeshade, instead of a beret, to distinguish them from artists.
- *Insignia.* More than one seems to be necessary. A writer in the upper brackets can wear appliquéd dollar signs on one lapel, and a tasteful typewriter insigne on the other, with crossed pens reserved for poets; miniature rejection slips, of course, for beginners.
- *Hashmarks.* Not using the Army's fogey stripes on sleeves to indicate length of service would be mere obstinacy; it is, after all, the easiest and best identification. Bronze stripes for single years; silver for five; gold for decades. Compulsory retirement after thirty years, except in national or editorial emergency.
- *Pay.* The equitable way to determine this is by length of service and not ability or popularity, just as in the Army. There could be efficiency tests, following the Army's procedure; the difference would be that it's not *who* you know, it's *whom*. Base pay must be on a word rate, but with minimum *and* maximum production, which should be a relief for the public.
- *Doglagging.* No actual dogtags need be issued, but serial numbers are absolutely necessary, to be placed after an author's name—and rank in the profession—at the be-

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ginning of a story. A reader seeing Capt. Something, 59-18M10S1-NY4NM19-OS4BA would know immediately that Author Something is five feet nine, weighs 180, is married ten years, has one son; has lived in New York four years, was born in New Mexico in 1919, went to Ohio State long enough to get a B.A. Being a captain, the author would, of course, have served between ten and twelve years and sold five novels and about 300 stories. With every upgrading, authors receive new ranks, but retain serial numbers.

● *Training.* Uniformity is badly needed here. Since most writers work as busboy, numbers runner, olive stuffer, floor scraper, deckhand, marijuana salesman, before selling enough fiction to live on, *all* writers should be required to go through the same jobs. It would eliminate the classified ad effect of most writers' biographies, yet would be taken for granted, thus retaining the romantic nature of the art.

IN CONTRAST to the simplicity of the foregoing, consider the sprawling effect of even these brief notes:

● Judith Merril (the Judd of Cyril Judd) is something over 21 but under 30; married to Frederik Pohl, the literary agent; has two daughters; is moving from New York to a newly acquired house in Red Bank, N. J.; edited for Bantam Books, now writes, housekeeps full —she says she means *full*—time; is better than medium tall, dark, and her friends consider her attractive.

● C. M. Kornbluth (the Cyril of Cyril Judd) is 28; married to a fine ceramicist; no children; lives in Chicago, where he heads Transradio Press, for which he writes 15,000 words a day and then comes home and writes science fiction; is medium height, a bit more than medium weight; has a peering, severe look and grimly saves all his humor for his stories; is considered attractive mainly by editors.

● William Tenn is 32, unmarried, no children; lives in New York; is five or six feet tall, weighs one or two hundred pounds; dark, eyeglassed; lavishes his humor in conversation, fiction, letters; is never home, *but doesn't go anywhere;* can't hold still long enough to be considered attractive by anyone.

● Fritz Leiber is 40, married, one son; lives in Chicago; assistant editor for *Science Digest;* is six or seven feet tall, weighs two or three hundred pounds; son of famed Shakespearean actor, looks like one himself; claims to have refused a drink once; is considered handsome only by women.

All this could have been compressed into title and serial number. Unfortunately, we would be somewhat compressed, too, in the process. Maybe it's better this way.

—H. L. GOLD

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VENUS

is a man's world

BY WILLIAM TENN

I'VE always said that even if Sis is seven years older than me—and a girl besides—she don't always know what's best. Put me on a spaceship jam-packed with three hundred females just aching to get themselves husbands in the one place they're still to be had—the planet Venus—and you know I'll be in trouble.

Bad trouble. With the law, which is the worst a boy can get into.

Twenty minutes after we lifted from the Sahara Spaceport, I wriggled out of my acceleration hammock and started for the door of our cabin.

"Now you be careful, Ferdinand," Sis called after me as she opened a book called *Family Prob-*

Illustrated by GENE FAWCETTE

Actually, there wouldn't be too much difference if women took over the Earth altogether. But not for some men and most boys!

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lems of the Frontier Woman. "Remember you're a nice boy. Don't make me ashamed of you."

I tore down the corridor. Most of the cabins had purple lights on in front of the doors, showing that the girls were still inside their hammocks. That meant only the ship's crew was up and about. Ship's crews are men; women are too busy with important things like government to run ships. I felt free all over—and happy. Now was my chance to really see the *Eleanor Roosevelt!*

IT WAS hard to believe I was traveling in space at last. Ahead and behind me, all the way up to where the companionway curved in out of sight, there was nothing but smooth black wall and smooth white doors—on and on and on. *Gee,* I thought excitedly, this is *one big ship!*

Of course, every once in a while I would run across a big scene of stars in the void set in the wall; but they were only pictures. Nothing that gave the feel of great empty space like I'd read about in *The Boy Rocketeers,* no portholes, no visiplates, nothing.

So when I came to the crossway, I stopped for a second, then turned left. To the right, see, there was Deck Four, then Deck Three, leading inward past the engine fo'c'sle to the main jets and the grav helix going *purr-purr-purrty-purr* in the comforting way big machinery has when it's happy and oiled. But to the left, the crossway led all the way to the outside level which ran just under the hull. There were portholes on the hull.

I'd studied all that out in our cabin, long before we'd lifted, on the transparent model of the ship hanging like a big cigar from the ceiling. Sis had studied it too, but she was looking for places like the dining salon and the library and Lifeboat 68 where we should go in case of emergency. I looked for the *important* things.

As I trotted along the crossway, I sort of wished that Sis hadn't decided to go after a husband on a luxury liner. On a cargo ship, now, I'd be climbing from deck to deck on a ladder instead of having gravity underfoot all the time just like I was home on the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. But women always know what's right, and a boy can only make faces and do what they say, same as the men have to do.

Still, it was pretty exciting to press my nose against the slots in the wall and see the sliding panels that could come charging out and block the crossway into an airtight fit in case a meteor or something smashed into the ship. And all along there were glass cases with spacesuits standing in them, like those knights they used to have back in the Middle Ages.

"In the event of disaster affecting the oxygen content of com-

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panionway." they had the words etched into the glass, "break glass with hammer upon wall, remove spacesuit and proceed to don it in the following fashion."

I read the "following fashion" until I knew it by heart. *Boy.* I said to myself, *I hope we have that kind of disaster. I'd sure like to get into one of those! Bet it would be more fun than those diving suits back in Undersea!*

And all the time I was alone. That was the best part.

THEN I passed Deck Twelve and there was a big sign. "Notice! Passengers not permitted past this point!" A big sign in red.

I peeked around the corner. I knew it—the next deck was the hull. I could see the portholes. Every twelve feet, they were, filled with the velvet of space and the dancing of more stars than I'd ever dreamed existed in the Universe.

There wasn't anyone on the deck, as far as I could see. And this distance from the grav helix, the ship seemed mighty quiet and lonely. If I just took one quick look . . .

But I thought of what Sis would say and I turned around obediently. Then I saw the big red sign again. "Passengers not permitted—"

Well! Didn't I know from my civics class that only women could be Earth Citizens these days? Sure, ever since the Male Desuffrage Act. And didn't I know that you had to be a citizen of a planet in order to get an interplanetary passport? Sis had explained it all to me in the careful, patient way she always talks politics and things like that to men.

"Technically, Ferdinand, I'm the only passenger in our family. You can't be one, because, not being a citizen, you can't acquire an Earth Passport. However, you'll be going to Venus on the strength of this clause—'Miss Evelyn Sparling and all dependent male members of family, this number not to exceed the registered quota of sub-regulations pertaining'—and so on. I want you to understand these matters, so that you will grow into a man who takes an active interest in world affairs. No matter what you hear, women really like and appreciate such men."

Of course, I never pay much attention to Sis when she says such dumb things. I'm old enough, I guess, to know that it isn't what *Women* like and appreciate that counts when it comes to people getting married. If it were, Sis and three hundred other pretty girls like her wouldn't be on their way to Venus to hook husbands.

Still, if I wasn't a passenger, the sign didn't have anything to do with me. I knew what Sis could say to *that,* but at least it was an argument I could use if it ever came up. So I broke the law.

I was glad I did. The stars were

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exciting enough, but away off to the left, about five times as big as I'd ever seen it, except in the movies, was the Moon, a great blob of gray and white pockmarks holding off the black of space. I was hoping to see the Earth, but I figured it must be on the other side of the ship or behind us. I pressed my nose against the port and saw the tiny flicker of a spaceliner taking off, Marsbound. I wished I was on that one!

Then I noticed, a little farther down the companionway, a stretch of blank wall where there should have been portholes. High up on the wall in glowing red letters were the words, "Lifeboat 47. Passengers: Thirty-two. Crew: Eleven. Unauthorized personnel keep away!"

Another one of those signs.

I CREPT up to the porthole nearest it and could just barely make out the stern jets where it was plastered against the hull. Then I walked under the sign and tried to figure the way you were supposed to get into it. There was a very thin line going around in a big circle that I knew must be the door. But I couldn't see any knobs or switches to open it with. Not even a button you could press.

That meant it was a sonic lock like the kind we had on the outer keeps back home in Undersea. But knock or voice? I tried the two knock combinations I knew, and nothing happened. I only remembered one voice key—might as well see if that's it, I figured.

"Twenty, Twenty-three. Open Sesame."

For a second, I thought I'd hit it just right out of all the million possible combinations— The door clicked inward toward a black hole, and a hairy hand as broad as my shoulders shot out of the hole. It closed around my throat and plucked me inside as if I'd been a baby sardine.

I bounced once on the hard lifeboat floor. Before I got my breath and sat up, the door had been shut again. When the light came on, I found myself staring up the muzzle of a highly polished blaster and into the cold blue eyes of the biggest man I'd ever seen.

He was wearing a one-piece suit made of some scaly green stuff that looked hard and soft at the same time.

His boots were made of it too, and so was the hood hanging down his back.

And his face was brown. Not just ordinary tan, you understand, but the deep, dark, burned-all-the-way-in brown I'd seen on the lifeguards in New Orleans whenever we took a surface vacation—the kind of tan that comes from day after broiling day under a really hot Sun. His hair looked as if it had once been blond, but now there were just long combed-out waves with a yellowish tinge that

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boiled all the way down to his shoulders.

I hadn't seen hair like that on a man except maybe in history books; every man I'd ever known had his hair cropped in the fashionable soup-bowl style. I was staring at his hair, almost forgetting about the blaster which I knew it was against the law for him to have at all, when I suddenly got scared right through.

His eyes.

They didn't blink and there seemed to be no expression around them. Just coldness. Maybe it was the kind of clothes he was wearing that did it, but all of a sudden I was reminded of a crocodile I'd seen in a surface zoo that had stared quietly at me for twenty minutes until it opened two long tooth-studded jaws.

"Green shatas!" he said suddenly. "Only a tadpole. I must be getting jumpy enough to splash."

Then he shoved the blaster away in a holster made of the same scaly leather, crossed his arms on his chest and began to study me. I grunted to my feet, feeling a lot better. The coldness had gone out of his eyes.

I held out my hand the way Sis had taught me. "My name is Ferdinand Sparling. I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Hope for your sake," he said to me, "that you aren't what you seem—tadpole brother to one of them husbandless anura."

"*What?*"

"A 'nuran is a female looking to nest. Anura is a herd of same. Come from Flatfolk ways."

"Flatfolk are the Venusian natives, aren't they? Are you a Venusian? What part of Venus do you come from? Why did you say you hope—"

He chuckled and swung me up into one of the bunks that lined the lifeboat. "Questions you ask," he said in his soft voice. "Venus is a sharp enough place for a dryhorn, let alone a tadpole dryhorn with a boss-minded sister."

"I'm not a dryleg," I told him proudly. "*We're* from Undersea."

"Dry*horn,* I said, not dryleg. And what's Undersea?"

"Well, in Undersea we called foreigners and newcomers drylegs. Just like on Venus, I guess, you call them dryhorns." And then I told him how Undersea had been built on the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, when the mineral resources of the land began to give out and engineers figured that a lot could still be reached from the sea bottoms.

HE NODDED. He'd heard about the sea-bottom mining cities that were bubbling under protective domes in every one of the Earth's oceans just about the same time settlements were springing up on the planets.

He looked impressed when I told him about Mom and Pop be-

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ing one of the first couples to get married in Undersea. He looked thoughtful when I told him how Sis and I had been born there and spent half our childhood listening to the pressure pumps. He raised his eyebrows and looked disgusted when I told how Mom, as Undersea representative on the World Council, had been one of the framers of the Male Desuffrage Act after the Third Atomic War had resulted in the Maternal Revolution.

HE ALMOST squeezed my arm when I got to the time Mom and Pop were blown up in a surfacing boat.

"Well, after the funeral, there was a little money, so Sis decided we might as well use it to migrate. There was no future for her on Earth, she figured. You know, the three-out-of-four."

"How's that?"

"The three-out-of-four. No more than three women out of every four on Earth can expect to find husbands. Not enough men to go around. Way back in the Twentieth Century, it began to be felt, Sis says, what with the wars and all. Then the wars went on and a lot more men began to die or get no good from the radioactivity. Then the best men went to the planets, Sis says, until by now even if a woman can scrounge a personal husband, he's not much to boast about."

The stranger nodded violently. "Not on Earth, he isn't. Those busybody anura make sure of that. What a place! Suffering gridniks, I had a bellyful!"

He told me about it. Women were scarce on Venus, and he hadn't been able to find any who were willing to come out to his lonely little islands; he had decided to go to Earth where there was supposed to be a surplus. Naturally, having been born and brought up on a very primitive planet, he didn't know "it's a woman's world," like the older boys in school used to say.

The moment he landed on Earth he was in trouble. He didn't know he had to register at a government-operated hotel for transient males; he threw a bartender through a thick plastic window for saying something nasty about the length of his hair; and *imagine!*—he not only resisted arrest, resulting in three hospitalized policemen, but he sassed the judge in open court!

"Told me a man wasn't supposed to say anything except through female attorneys. Told *her* that where *I* came from, a man spoke his piece when he'd a mind to, and his woman walked by his side."

"What happened?" I asked breathlessly.

"Oh, Guilty of This and Contempt of That. That blown-up brinosaur took my last munit for fines, then explained that she was

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remitting the rest because I was a foreigner and uneducated." His eyes grew dark for a moment. He chuckled again. "But I wasn't going to serve all those fancy little prison sentences. Forcible Citizenship Indoctrination, they call it? Shook the dead-dry dust of the misbegotten, God forsaken mother world from my feet forever. The women on it deserve their men. My pockets were folded from the fines, and the paddlefeet were looking for me so close I didn't dare radio for more munit. So I stowed away."

FOR a moment, I didn't understand him. When I did, I was almost ill. "Y-you mean," I choked, "th-that you're b-breaking the law right now? And I'm with you while you're doing it?"

He leaned over the edge of the bunk and stared at me very seriously. "What breed of tadpole are they turning out these days? Besides, what business do *you* have this close to the hull?"

After a moment of sober reflection, I nodded. "You're right. I've also become a male outside the law. We're in this together."

He guffawed. Then he sat up and began cleaning his blaster. I found myself drawn to the bright killer-tube with exactly the fascination Sis insists such things have always had for men.

"Ferdinand your label? That's not right for a sprouting tadpole. I'll call you Ford. My name's Butt. Butt Lee Brown."

I liked the sound of Ford. "Is Butt a nickname, too?"

"Yeah. Short for Alberta, but I haven't found a man who can draw a blaster fast enough to call me that. You see, Pop came over in the eighties—the big wave of immigrants when they evacuated Ontario. Named all us boys after Canadian provinces. I was the youngest, so I got the name they were savi. g for a girl."

"You had a lot of brothers, Mr. Butt?"

He grinned with a mighty set of teeth. "Oh, a nestful. Of course, they were all killed in the Blue Chicago Rising by the MacGregor boys—all except me and Saskatchewan. Then Sas and me hunted the MacGregors down. Took a heap of time; we didn't float Jock MacGregor's ugly face down the Tuscany till both of us were pretty near grown up."

I walked up close to where I could see the tiny bright copper coils of the blaster above the firing button. "Have you killed a lot of men with that, Mr. Butt?"

"Butt. Just plain Butt to you, Ford." He frowned and sighted at the light globe. "No more'n twelve —not counting five government paddlefeet, of course. I'm a peaceable planter. Way I figure it, violence never accomplishes much that's important. My brother Sas, now—"

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HE HAD just begun to work into a wonderful anecdote about his brother when the dinner gong rang. Butt told me to scat. He said I was a growing tadpole and needed my vitamins. And he mentioned, very off-hand, that he wouldn't at all object if I brought him some fresh fruit. It seemed there was nothing but processed foods in the lifeboat and Butt was used to a farmer's diet.

Trouble was, he was a special kind of farmer. Ordinary fruit would have been pretty easy to sneak into my pockets at meals. I even found a way to handle the kelp and giant watercress Mr. Brown liked, but things like seaweed salt and Venusian mudgrapes just had too strong a smell. Twice, the mechanical hamper refused to accept my jacket for laundering and I had to wash it myself. But I learned so many wonderful things about Venus every time I visited that stowaway . . .

I learned three wild-wave songs of the Flatfolk and what it is that the native Venusians hate so much; I learned how you tell the difference between a lousy government paddlefoot from New Kalamazoo and the slaptoe slinker who is the planter's friend. After a lot of begging, Butt Lee Brown explained the workings of his blaster, explained it so carefully that I could name every part and tell what it did from the tiny round electrodes to the long spirals of transformer. But no matter what, he would never let me hold it.

"Sorry, Ford, old tad," he would drawl, spinning around and around in the control swivel-chair at the nose of the lifeboat. "But way I look at it, a man who lets somebody else handle his blaster is like the giant whose heart was in an egg that an enemy found. When you've grown enough so's your pop feels you ought to have a weapon, why, then's the time to learn it and you might's well learn fast. Before then, you're plain too young to be even near it."

"I don't have a father to give me one when I come of age. I don't even have an older brother as head of my family like your brother Labrador. All I have is Sis. And *she*—"

"She'll marry some fancy dryhorn who's never been farther South than the Polar Coast. And she'll stay head of the family, if I know her breed of green shata. *Bossy, opinionated.* By the way, Fordie," he said, rising and stretching so the fish-leather bounced and rippled off his biceps, "that sister. She ever . . ."

And he'd be off again, cross-examining me about Evelyn. I sat in the swivel chair he'd vacated and tried to answer his questions. But there was a lot of stuff I didn't know. Evelyn was a healthy girl, for instance; how healthy, exactly, I had no way of finding out. Yes, I'd tell him, my aunts on both sides

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of my family each had had more than the average number of children. No, we'd never done any farming to speak of, back in Undersea, but—yes, I'd guess Evelyn knew about as much as any girl there when it came to diving equipment and pressure pump regulation.

How would I know that stuff would lead to trouble for me?

SIS had insisted I come along to the geography lecture. Most of the other girls who were going to Venus for husbands talked to each other during the lecture, but not *my* sister! She hung on every word, took notes even, and asked enough questions to make the perspiring purser really work in those orientation periods.

"I am very sorry, Miss Sparling," he said with pretty heavy sarcasm, "but I cannot remember any of the agricultural products of the Macro Continent. Since the human population is well below one per thousand square miles, it can readily be understood that the quantity of tilled soil, land or sub-surface, is so small that—Wait, I remember something. The Macro Continent exports a fruit though not exactly an edible one. The wild *dunging* drug is harvested there by criminal speculators. Contrary to belief on Earth, the traffic has been growing in recent years. In fact—"

"Pardon me, sir," I broke in, "but doesn't *dunging* come only from Leif Erickson Island off the Moscow Peninsula of the Macro Continent? You remember, purser —Wang Li's third exploration, where he proved the island and the peninsula didn't meet for most of the year?"

The purser nodded slowly. "I forgot," he admitted. "Sorry, ladies, but the boy's right. Please make the correction in your notes."

But Sis was the only one who took notes, and she didn't take that one. She stared at me for a moment, biting her lower lip thoughtfully, while I got sicker and sicker. Then she shut her pad with the final gesture of the right hand that Mom used to use just before challenging the opposition to come right down on the Council floor and debate it out with her.

"Ferdinand," Sis said, "let's go back to our cabin."

The moment she sat me down and walked slowly around me, I knew I was in for it. "I've been reading up on Venusian geography in the ship's library," I told her in a hurry.

"No doubt," she said drily. She shook her night-black hair out. "But you aren't going to tell me that you read about *dunging* in the ship's library. The books there have been censored by a government agent of Earth against the possibility that they might be read by susceptible young male minds like yours. She would not have allowed —this Terran Agent—"

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"Paddlefoot," I sneered.

Sis sat down hard in our zoom-air chair. "Now that's a term," she said carefully, "that is used only by Venusian riffraff."

"They're not!"

"Not what?"

"Riffraff," I had to answer, knowing I was getting in deeper all the time and not being able to help it. I mustn't give Mr. Brown away! "They're trappers and farmers, pioneers and explorers, who're building Venus. And it takes a real man to build on a hot, hungry hell like Venus."

"Does it, now?" she said, looking at me as if I were beginning to grow a second pair of ears. "Tell me more."

"You can't have meek, law-abiding, women-ruled men when you start civilization on a new planet. You've got to have men who aren't afraid to make their own law if necessary—with their own guns. That's where law begins; the books get written up later."

"You're going to *tell,* Ferdinand, what evil, criminal male is speaking through your mouth!"

"Nobody!" I insisted. "They're my own ideas!"

"They are remarkably well-organized for a young boy's ideas. A boy who, I might add, has previously shown a ridiculous but nonetheless entirely masculine boredom with political philosophy. I plan to have a government career on that new planet you talk about, Ferdinand—after I have found a good, steady husband, of course—and I don't look forward to a masculinist radical in the family. Now, who has been filling your head with all this nonsense?"

I WAS sweating. Sis has that deadly bulldog approach when she feels someone is lying. I pulled my pulpast handkerchief from my pocket to wipe my face. Something rattled to the floor.

"What is this picture of me doing in your pocket, Ferdinand?"

A trap seemed to be hinging noisily into place. "One of the passengers wanted to see how you looked in a bathing suit."

"The passengers on this ship are all female. I can't imagine any of them that curious about my appearance. Ferdinand, it's a man who has been giving you these anti-social ideas, isn't it? A war-mongering masculinist like all the frustrated men who want to engage in government and don't have the vaguest idea how to. Except, of course, in their ancient, bloody ways. Ferdinand, who has been perverting that sunny and carefree soul of yours?"

"Nobody! *Nobody!*"

"Ferdinand, there's no point in lying! I demand—"

"I told you, Sis. I told you! And don't call me Ferdinand. Call me Ford."

"Ford? *Ford?* Now, you listen to me, Ferdinand . . ."

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After that it was all over but the confession. That came in a few moments. I couldn't fool Sis. She just knew me too well, I decided miserably. Besides, she was a girl.

All the same, I wouldn't get Mr. Butt Lee Brown into trouble if I could help it. I made Sis promise she wouldn't turn him in if I took her to him. And the quick, nodding way she said she would made me feel just a little better.

The door opened on the signal, "Sesame." When Butt saw somebody was with me, he jumped and the ten-inch blaster barrel grew out of his fingers. Then he recognized Sis from the pictures.

He stepped to one side and, with the same sweeping gesture, holstered his blaster and pushed his green hood off. It was Sis's turn to jump when she saw the wild mass of hair rolling down his back.

"An honor, Miss Sparling," he said in that rumbly voice. "Please come right in. There's a hurry-up draft."

So Sis went in and I followed right after her. Mr. Brown closed the door. I tried to catch his eye so I could give him some kind of hint or explanation, but he had taken a couple of his big strides and was in the control section with Sis She didn't give ground, though; I'll say that for her. She only came to his chest, but she had her arms crossed sternly.

"First, Mr. Brown," she began, like talking to a cluck of a kid in class, "you realize that you are not only committing the political crime of traveling without a visa, and the criminal one of stowing away without paying your fare, but the moral delinquency of consuming stores intended for the personnel of this ship solely in emergency?"

HE OPENED his mouth to its maximum width and raised an enormous hand. Then he let the air out and dropped his arm.

"I take it you either have no defense or care to make none," Sis added caustically.

Butt laughed slowly and carefully as if he were going over each word. "Wonder if all the anura talk like that. And *you* want to foul up Venus."

"We haven't done so badly on Earth, after the mess you men made of politics. It needed a revolution of the mothers before—"

"Needed nothing. Everyone wanted peace. Earth is a weary old world."

"It's a world of strong moral fiber compared to yours, Mr. Alberta Lee Brown." Hearing his rightful name made him move suddenly and tower over her. Sis said with a certain amount of hurry and change of tone, "What *do* you have to say about stowing away and using up lifeboat stores?"

HE COCKED his head and considered a moment. "Look," he said finally, "I have more than

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enough munit to pay for round trip tickets, but I couldn't get a return visa because of that brinosaur judge and all the charges she hung on me. Had to stow away. Picked the *Eleanor Roosevelt* because a couple of the boys in the crew are friends of mine and they were willing to help. But this lifeboat—don't you know that every passenger ship carries four times as many lifeboats as it needs? Not to mention the food I didn't eat because it stuck in my throat?"

"Yes," she said bitterly. "You had this boy steal fresh fruit for you. I suppose you didn't know that under space regulations that makes him equally guilty?"

"No, Sis, he didn't," I was beginning to argue. "All he wanted—"

"Sure I knew. Also know that if I'm picked up as a stowaway, I'll be sent back to Earth to serve out those fancy little sentences."

"Well, you're guilty of them, aren't you?"

He waved his hands at her impatiently. "I'm not talking law, female; I'm talking sense. Listen! I'm in trouble because I went to Earth to look for a wife. You're standing here right now because you're on your way to Venus for a husband. So let's."

Sis actually staggered back. "Let's? Let's *what?* Are—are you daring to suggest that—that—"

"Now, Miss Sparling, no hoopla. I'm saying let's get married, and you know it. You figured out from what the boy told you that I was chewing on you for a wife. You're healthy and strong, got good heredity, you know how to operate sub-surface machinery, you've lived underwater, and your disposition's no worse than most of the anura I've seen. Prolific stock, too."

I was so excited I just had to yell: "Gee, Sis, say *yes!*"

MY SISTER'S voice was steaming with scorn. "And what makes you think that I'd consider you a desirable husband?"

He spread his hands genially. "Figure if you wanted a poodle, you're pretty enough to pick one up on Earth. Figure if you charge off to Venus, you don't want a poodle, you want a man. I'm one. I own three islands in the Galertan Archipelago that'll be good oozing mudgrape land when they're cleared. Not to mention the rich berzeliot beds offshore. I got no bad habits outside of having my own way. I'm also passable good-looking for a slaptoe planter. Besides, if you marry me you'll be the first mated on this ship—and that's a splash most nesting females like to make."

There was a longish stretch of quiet. Sis stepped back and measured him slowly with her eyes; there was a lot to look at. He waited patiently while she covered the distance from his peculiar green boots to that head of hair. I was

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so excited I was gulping instead of breathing. Imagine having Butt for a brother-in-law and living on a wet-plantation in Flatfolk country!

But then I remembered Sis's level head and I didn't have much hope any more.

"You know," she began, "there's more to marriage than just—"

"So there is," he cut in. "Well, we can try each other for taste." And he pulled her in, both of his great hands practically covering her slim, straight back.

Neither of them said anything for a bit after he let go. Butt spoke up first.

"Now, me," he said, "I'd vote yes."

Sis ran the tip of her tongue kind of delicately from side to side of her mouth. Then she stepped back slowly and looked at him as if she were figuring out how many feet high he was. She kept on moving backward, tapping her chin, while Butt and I got more and more impatient. When she touched the lifeboat door, she pushed it open and jumped out.

BUTT ran over and looked down the crossway. After a while, he shut the door and came back beside me. "Well," he said, swinging to a bunk, "that's sort of it."

"You're better off, Butt," I burst out. "You shouldn't have a woman like Sis for a wife. She looks small and helpless, but don't forget she was trained to run an underwater city!"

"Wasn't worrying about that," he grinned. "*I* grew up in the fifteen long years of the Blue Chicago Rising. Nope." He turned over on his back and clicked his teeth at the ceiling. "Think we'd have nested out nicely."

I hitched myself up to him and we sat on the bunk, glooming away at each other. Then we heard the tramp of feet in the crossway.

Butt swung down and headed for the control compartment in the nose of the lifeboat. He had his blaster out and was cursing very interestingly. I started after him, but he picked me up by the seat of my jumper and tossed me toward the door. The Captain came in and tripped over me.

I got all tangled up in his gold braid and million-mile space buttons. When we finally got to our feet and sorted out right, he was breathing very hard. The Captain was a round little man with a plump, golden face and a very scared look on it. He *humphed* at me, just the way Sis does, and lifted me by the scruff of my neck. The Chief Mate picked me up and passed me to the Second Assistant Engineer.

Sis was there, being held by the purser on one side and the Chief Computer's Mate on the other. Behind them, I could see a flock of wide-eyed female passengers.

"You cowards!" Sis was raging.

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"Letting your Captain face a dangerous outlaw all by himself!"

"I dunno, Miss Sparling," the Computer's Mate said, scratching the miniature slide-rule insignia on his visor with his free hand. "The Old Man would've been willing to let it go with a log entry, figuring the spaceport paddlefeet could pry out the stowaway when we landed. But you had to quote the Mother Anita Law at him, and he's in there doing his duty. He figures the rest of us are family men, too, and there's no sense making orphans."

"You promised, Sis," I told her through my teeth. "You promised you wouldn't get Butt into trouble!"

She tossed her spiral curls at me and ground a heel into the purser's instep. He screwed up his face and howled, but he didn't let go of her arm.

"*Shush*, Ferdinand, this is serious!"

It was. I heard the Captain say, "I'm not carrying a weapon, Brown."

"Then *get* one," Butt's low, lazy voice floated out.

"No, thanks. You're as handy with that thing as I am with a rocketboard." The Captain's words got a little fainter as he walked forward. Butt growled like a gusher about to blow.

"I'm counting on your being a good guy, Brown." The Captain's voice quavered just a bit. "I'm banking on what I heard about the blast-happy Browns every time I lifted gravs in New Kalamazoo; they have a code, they don't burn unarmed men."

JUST about this time, events in the lifeboat went down to a mumble. The top of my head got wet and I looked up. There was sweat rolling down the Second Assistant's forehead; it converged at his nose and bounced off the tip in a sizable stream. I twisted out of the way.

"What's happening?" Sis gritted, straining toward the lock.

"Butt's trying to decide whether he wants him fried or scrambled," the Computer's Mate said, pulling her back. "Hey, purse, remember when the whole family with their pop at the head went into Heatwave to argue with Colonel Leclerc?"

"Eleven dead, sixty-four injured," the purser answered mechanically. "And no more army stationed south of Icebox." His right ear twitched irritably. "But what're they saying?"

Suddenly we heard. "By authority vested in me under the Pomona College Treaty," the Captain was saying very loudly, "I arrest you for violation of Articles Sixteen to Twenty-one inclusive of the Space Transport Code, and order your person and belongings impounded for the duration of this voyage as set forth in Sections Forty-one and Forty-five—"

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"Forty-three and Forty-five," Sis groaned. "Sections Forty-three and Forty-five, I told him. I even made him repeat it after me!"

"—of the Mother Anita Law, SC 2136, Emergency Interplanetary Directives."

WE ALL waited breathlessly for Butt's reply. The seconds ambled on and there was no clatter of electrostatic discharge, no smell of burning flesh.

Then we heard some feet walking. A big man in a green suit swung out into the crossway. That was Butt. Behind him came the Captain, holding the blaster gingerly with both hands. Butt had a funny, thoughtful look on his face.

The girls surged forward when they saw him, scattering the crew to one side. They were like a school of sharks that had just caught sight of a dying whale.

"M-m-m-m! Are all Venusians built like that?"

"Men like that are worth the mileage!"

"I want him!" "I want him!" "I want him!"

Sis had been let go. She grabbed my free hand and pulled me away. She was trying to look only annoyed, but her eyes had bright little bubbles of fury popping in them.

"The cheap extroverts! And they call themselves responsible women!"

I was angry, too. And I let her know, once we were in our cabin. "What about that promise, Sis? You said you wouldn't turn him in. You *promised!*"

She stopped walking around the room as if she had been expecting to get to Venus on foot. "I know I did, Ferdinand, but he forced me."

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"My name is Ford and I don't understand.

"Your name is Ferdinand and stop trying to act forcefully like a girl. It doesn't become you. In just a few days, you'll forget all this and be your simple, carefree self again. I really truly meant to keep my word. From what you'd told me, Mr. Brown seemed to be a fundamentally decent chap despite his barbaric notions on equality between the sexes—or worse. I was positive I could shame him into a more rational social behavior and make him give himself up. Then he—he—"

She pressed her fingernails into her palms and let out a long, glaring sigh at the door. "Then he kissed me! Oh, it was a good enough kiss—Mr. Brown has evidently had a varied and colorful background—but the galling idiocy of the man, trying that! I was just getting over the colossal impudence involved in *his* proposing marriage—as if *he* had to bear the children!—and was considering the offer seriously, on its merits, as one should consider *all* suggestions, when he deliberately dropped the pretense of reason. He appealed to me as most of the savage ancients appealed to their women, as an emotional machine. Throw the correct sexual switches, says this theory, and the female surrenders herself ecstatically to the doubtful and bloody murk of masculine plans."

THERE was a double knock on the door and the Captain walked in without waiting for an invitation. He was still holding Butt's blaster. He pointed it at me. "Get your hands up, Ferdinand Sparling," he said.

I did.

"I hereby order your detention for the duration of this voyage, for aiding and abetting a stowaway, as set forth in Sections Forty-one and Forty-five—"

"Forty-three and Forty-five," Sis interrupted him, her eyes getting larger and rounder. "But you gave me your word of honor that no charges would be lodged against the boy!"

"Forty-one and Forty-five," he corrected her courteously, still staring fiercely at me. "I looked it up. Of the Anita Mason Law, Emergency Interplanetary Directives. That was the usual promise one makes to an informer, but I made it before I knew it was Butt Lee Brown you were talking about. I didn't want to arrest Butt Lee Brown. You forced me. So I'm breaking my promise to you, just as, I understand, you broke your promise to your brother. They'll both be picked up at New Kalamazoo Spaceport and sent Terraward for trial."

"But I used all of our money to buy passage," Sis wailed.

"And now you'll have to return with the boy. I'm sorry, Miss Sparling. But as you explained to

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me, a man who has been honored with an important official position should stay close to the letter of the law for the sake of other men who are trying to break down terrestrial anti-male prejudice. Of course, there's a way out."

"There is? Tell me, please!"

"Can I lower my hands a minute?" I asked.

"No, you can't, son—not according to the armed surveillance provisions of the Mother Anita Law. Miss Sparling, if you'd marry Brown—now, now, don't look at me like that!—we could let the whole matter drop. A shipboard wedding and he goes on your passport as a 'dependent male member of family,' which means, so far as the law is concerned, that he had a regulation passport from the beginning of this voyage. And once we touch Venusian soil he can contact his bank and pay for passage. On the record, no crime was ever committed. He's free, the boy's free, and you—"

"—Are married to an uncombed desperado who doesn't know enough to sit back and let a woman run things. Oh, you should be ashamed!"

THE Captain shrugged and spread his arms wide.

"Perhaps I should be, but that's what comes of putting men into responsible positions, as you would say. See here, Miss Sparling, *I* didn't want to arrest Brown, and, if it's at all possible, I'd still prefer not to. The crew, officers and men, all go along with me. We may be legal residents of Earth, but our work requires us to be on Venus several times a year. We don't want to be disliked by any members of the highly irritable Brown clan or its collateral branches. Butt Lee Brown himself, for all of his savage appearance in your civilized eyes, is a man of much influence on the Polar Continent. In his own bailiwick, the Galertan Archipelago, he makes, breaks and occasionally readjusts officials. Then there's his brother Saskatchewan who considers Butt a helpless, put-upon youngster—"

"Much influence, you say? Mr. Brown has?" Sis was suddenly thoughtful.

"*Power,* actually. The kind a strong man usually wields in a newly settled community. Besides, Miss Sparling, you're going to Venus for a husband because the male-female ratio on Earth is reversed. Well, not only is Butt Lee Brown a first class catch, but you can't afford to be too particular in any case. While you're fairly pretty, you won't bring any wealth into a marriage and your high degree of opinionation is not likely to be well-received on a backward, masculinist world. Then, too, the woman-hunger is not so great any more, what with the *Marie Curie* and the *Fatima* having already deposited their cargoes, the *Mme. Sun*

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Yat Sen due to arrive next month . . ."

SIS nodded to herself, waved the door open, and walked out.

"Let's hope," the Captain said. "Like any father used to say, a man who knows how to handle women, how to get around them without their knowing it, doesn't need to know anything else in this life. I'm plain wasted in space. You can lower your hands now, son."

We sat down and I explained the blaster to him. He was very interested. He said all Butt had told him—in the lifeboat when they decided to use my arrest as a club over Sis—was to keep the safety catch all the way up against his thumb. I could see he really had been excited about carrying a lethal weapon around. He told me that back in the old days, captains—sea captains, that is—actually had the right to keep guns in their cabins all the time to put down mutinies and other things our ancestors did.

The telewall flickered, and we turned it on. Sis smiled down. "Everything's all right, Captain. Come up and marry us, please."

"What did you stick him for?" he asked. "What was the price?"

Sis's full lips went thin and hard, the way Mom's used to. Then she thought better of it and laughed. "Mr. Brown is going to see that I'm elected sheriff of the Galertan Archipelago."

"And I thought she'd settle for a county clerkship!" the Captain muttered as we spun up to the brig.

The doors were open and girls were chattering in every corner. Sis came up to the Captain to discuss arrangements. I slipped away and found Butt sitting with folded arms in a corner of the brig. He grinned at me. "Hi, tadpole. Like the splash?"

I shook my head unhappily. "Butt, why did you do it? I'd sure love to be your brother-in-law, but, gosh, you didn't have to marry Sis." I pointed at some of the bustling females. Sis was going to have three hundred bridesmaids. "Any one of them would have jumped at the chance to be your wife. And once on any woman's passport, you'd be free. Why Sis?"

"That's what the Captain said in the lifeboat. Told him same thing I'm telling you. I'm stubborn. What I like at first, I keep on liking. What I want at first, I keep on wanting until I get."

"Yes, but making Sis sheriff! And you'll have to back her up with your blaster. What'll happen to that man's world?"

"Wait'll after we nest and go out to my islands." He produced a hard-lipped, smug grin, sighting it at Sis's slender back. "She'll find herself sheriff over a bunch of natives and exactly two Earth males —you and me. I got a hunch that'll keep her pretty busy, though."

—WILLIAM TENN

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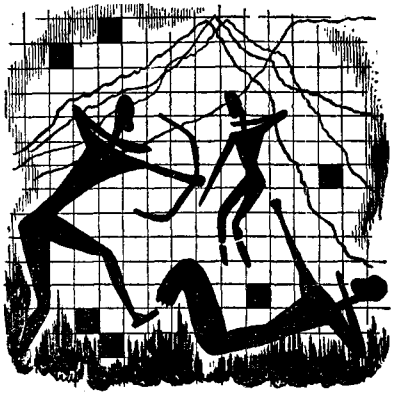

Common Denominator

BY JOHN D. MacDONALD

Advanced races generally are eager to share their knowledge with primitive ones. In this case . . . with Earthmen!

Illustrated by DON HUNTER

WHEN Scout Group Forty flickered back across half the Galaxy with a complete culture study of a Class Seven civilization on three planets of Argus Ten, the Bureau of Stellar Defense had, of course, a priority claim on all data. Class Sevens were rare and of high potential danger, so all personnel of Group Forty were placed in tight quarantine during the thirty days required for a detailed analysis of the thousands of film spools.

News of the contact leaked out and professional alarmists predicted dire things on the news screens of the three home planets of Sol. A retired admiral of the Space Navy published an article in which

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he stated bitterly that the fleet had been weakened by twenty years of softness in high places.

On the thirty-first day, B.S.D. reported to System President Mize that the inhabitants of the three planets of Argus 10 constituted no threat, that there was no military necessity for alarm, that approval of a commerce treaty was recommended, that all data was being turned over to the Bureau of Stellar Trade and Economy for analysis, that personnel of Scout Group Forty was being given sixty days' leave before reassignment.

B.S.T.E. released film to all commercial networks at once, and visions of slavering oily monsters disappeared from the imagination of mankind. The Argonauts, as they came to be called, were pleasantly similar to mankind. It was additional proof that only in the rarest instance was the life-apex on any planet in the home Galaxy an abrupt divergence from the "human" form. The homogeneousness of planet elements throughout the Galaxy made homogeneousness of life-apex almost a truism. The bipedal, oxygen-breathing vertebrate with opposing thumb seems best suited for survival.

It was evident that, with training, the average Argonaut could pass almost unnoticed in the Solar System. The flesh tones were brightly pink, like that of a sunburned human. Cranial hair was uniformly taffy-yellow. They were heavier and more fleshy than humans. Their women had a pronounced Rubens look, a warm, moist, rosy, comfortable look.

EVERYONE remarked on the placidity and contentment of facial expressions, by human standards. The inevitable comparison was made. The Argonauts looked like a race of inn and beer-garden proprietors in the Bavarian Alps. With leather pants to slap, stein lids to click, feathers in Tyrolean hats and peasant skirts on their women, they would represent a culture and a way of life that had been missing from Earth for far too many generations.

Eight months after matters had been turned over to B.S.T.E., the First Trade Group returned to Earth with a bewildering variety of artifacts and devices, plus a round dozen Argonauts. The Argonauts had learned to speak Solian with an amusing guttural accent. They beamed on everything and everybody. They were great pets until the novelty wore off. Profitable trade was inaugurated, because the Argonaut devices all seemed designed to make life more pleasant. The scent-thesizer became very popular once it was adjusted to meet human tastes. Worn as a lapel button, it could create the odor of pine, broiled steak, spring flowers, Scotch whisky, musk—even skunk for the practical jokers who exist in all ages and eras.

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Any home equipped with an Argonaut static-clean never became dusty. It used no power and had to be emptied only once a year.

Technicians altered the Argonaut mechanical game animal so that it looked like an Earth rabbit. The weapons which shot a harmless beam were altered to look like rifles. After one experience with the new game, hunters were almost breathless with excitement. The incredible agility of the mechanical animal, its ability to take cover, the fact that, once the beam felled it, you could use it over and over again —all this made for the promulgation of new non-lethal hunting.

LAMBERT, chief of the Bureau of Racial Maturity, waited patiently for his chance at the Argonaut data. The cramped offices in the temporary wing of the old System Security Building, the meager appropriation, the obsolete office equipment, the inadequate staff all testified not only to the Bureau's lack of priority, but also to a lack of knowledge of its existence on the part of many System officials. Lambert, crag-faced, sandy, slow-moving, was a historian, anthropologist and sociologist. He was realist enough to understand that if the Bureau of Racial Maturity happened to be more important in System Government, it would probably be headed by a man with fewer academic and more political qualifications.

And Lambert knew, beyond any doubt at all, that the B.R.M. was more important to the race and the future of the race than any other branch of System Government.

Set up by President Tolles, an adult and enlightened administrator, the Bureau was now slowly being strangled by a constantly decreasing appropriation.

Lambert knew that mankind had come too far, too fast. Mankind had dropped out of a tree with all the primordial instincts to rend and tear and claw. Twenty thousand years later, and with only a few thousand years of dubiously recorded history, he had reached the stars. It was too quick.

Lambert knew that mankind must become mature in order to survive. The domination of instinct had to be watered down, and rapidly. Selective breeding might do it, but it was an answer impossible to enforce. He hoped that one day the records of an alien civilization would give him the answer. After a year of bureaucratic wriggling, feints and counter-feints, he had acquired the right of access to Scout Group Data.

As his patience dwindled he wrote increasingly firm letters to Central Files and Routing. In the end, when he finally located the data improperly stored in the closed files of the B.S.T.E., he took no more chances. He went in person with an assistant named Cooper and a commandeered electric hand-

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truck, and bullied a B.S.T.E. storage clerk into accepting a receipt for the Argonaut data. The clerk's cooperation was lessened by never having heard of the Bureau of Racial Maturity.

THE file contained the dictionary and grammar compiled by the Scout Group, plus all the films taken on the three planets of Argus 10, plus micro-films of twelve thousand books written in the language of the Argonauts. Their written language was ideographic, and thus presented more than usual difficulties. Lambert knew that translations had been made, but somewhere along the line they had disappeared.

Lambert set his whole staff to work on the language. He hired additional linguists out of his own thin enough pocket. He gave up all outside activities in order to hasten the progress of his own knowledge. His wife, respecting Lambert's high order of devotion to his work, kept their two half-grown children from interfering during those long evenings when he studied and translated at home.

Two evenings a week Lambert called on Vonk Poogla, the Argonaut assigned to Trade Coordination, and improved his conversational Argonian to the point where he could obtain additional historical information from the pink wide "man."

Of the twelve thousand books, the number of special interest to Lambert were only one hundred and ten. On those he based his master chart. An animated film of the chart was prepared at Lambert's own expense, and, when it was done, he requested an appointment with Simpkin, Secretary for Stellar Affairs, going through all the normal channels to obtain the interview. He asked an hour of Simpkin's time. It took two weeks.

Simpkin was a big florid man with iron-gray hair, skeptical eyes and that indefinable look of political opportunism.

He came around his big desk to shake Lambert's hand. "Ah . . . Lambert! Glad to see you, fella. I ought to get around to my Bureau Chiefs more often, but you know how hectic things are up here."

"I know, Mr. Secretary. I have something here of the utmost importance and—"

"Bureau of Racial Maturity, isn't it? I never did know exactly what you people do. Sort of progress records or something?"

"Of the utmost importance," Lambert repeated doggedly.

Simpkin smiled. "I hear that all day, but go ahead."

"I want to show you a chart. A historical chart of the Argonaut civilization." Lambert put the projector in position and plugged it in. He focused it on the wall screen.

"It was decided," Simpkin said firmly, "that the Argonauts are not a menace to us in any—"

"I know that, sir. Please look at

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the chart first and then, when you've seen it, I think you'll know what I mean."

"Go ahead," Simpkin agreed resignedly.

"I can be accused of adding apples and lemons in this presentation, sir. Note the blank chart. The base line is in years, adjusted to our calendar so as to give a comparison. Their recorded history covers twelve thousand of our years. That's better than four times ours. Now note the red line. That shows the percentage of their total population involved in wars. It peaked eight thousand years ago. Note how suddenly it drops after that. In five hundred years it sinks to the base line and does not appear again.

"Here comes the second line. Crimes of violence. It also peaks eight thousand years ago. It drops less quickly than the war line, and never does actually cut the base line. Some crime still exists there. But a very, very tiny percentage compared to ours on a population basis, or to their own past. The third line, the yellow line climbing abruptly, is the index of insanity. Again a peak during the same approximate period in their history. Again a drop almost to the base line."

SIMPKIN pursed his heavy lips. "Odd, isn't it?"

"Now this fourth line needs some explaining. I winnowed out death rates by age groups. Their

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life span is 1.3 times ours, so it had to be adjusted. I found a strange thing. I took the age group conforming to our 18 to 24 year group. That green line. Note that by the time we start getting decent figures, nine thousand years ago, it remains almost constant, and at a level conforming to our own experience. Now note what happens when the green line reaches a point eight thousand years ago. See how it begins to climb? Now steeper, almost vertical. It remains at a high level for almost a thousand years, way beyond the end of their history of war, and then descends slowly toward the base line, leveling out about two thousand years ago."

Lambert clicked off the projector.

"Is that all?" Simpkin asked.

"Isn't it enough? I'm concerned with the future of our own race. Somehow the Argonauts have found an answer to war, insanity, violence. We need that answer if we are to survive."

"Come now, Lambert," Simpkin said wearily.

"Don't you see it? Their history parallels ours. They had our same problems. They saw disaster ahead and did something about it. What did they do? I have to know that."

"How do you expect to?

"I want travel orders to go there."

"I'm afraid that's quite impossible. There are no funds for that sort of jaunt, Lambert. And I think you are worrying over nothing."

"Shall I show you some of our own trends? Shall I show you murder turning from the most horrid crime into a relative commonplace? Shall I show you the slow inevitable increase in asylum space?"

"I know all that, man. But look at the Argonauts! Do you want that sort of stagnation? Do you want a race of fat, pink, sleepy—"

"Maybe they had a choice. A species of stagnation, or the end of their race. Faced with that choice, which would you pick, Mr. Secretary?"

"There are no funds."

"All I want is authority. I'll pay my own way."

And he did.

REAN was the home planet of the Argonauts, the third from their sun. When the trade ship flickered into three-dimensional existence, ten thousand miles above Rean, Lambert stretched the spaceache out of his long bones and muscles and smiled at Vonk Poogla.

"You could have saved me the trip, you know," Lambert said.

A grin creased the round pink visage. "Nuddink ventured, nuddink gained. Bezides, only my cousin can speak aboud this thing you vunder aboud. My cousin is werry important person. He is one picks me to go to your planet."

Vonk Poogla was transported with delight at being able to show

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the wonders of the ancient capital city to Lambert. It had been sacked and burned over eight thousand Earth years before, and now it was mellowed by eighty-three centuries of unbroken peace. It rested in the pastel twilight, and there were laughter and soft singing in the broad streets. Never had Lambert felt such a warm aura of security and . . . love. No other word but that ultimate one seemed right.

In the morning they went to the squat blue building where Vonk Soobuknoora, the important person, had his administrative headquarters. Lambert, knowing enough of Argonaut governmental structure to understand that Soobuknoora was titular head of the three-planet government, could not help but compare the lack of protocol with what he could expect were he to try to take Vonk Poogla for an interview with President Mize.

Soobuknoora was a smaller, older edition of Poogla, his pink face wrinkled, his greening hair retaining only a trace of the original yellow. Soobuknoora spoke no Solian and he was very pleased to find that Lambert spoke Argonian.

Soobuknoora watched the animated chart with considerable interest. After it was over, he seemed lost in thought.

"It is something so private with us, Man Lambert, that we seldom speak of it to each other," Soobuknoora said in Argonian. "It is not written. Maybe we have shame—a guilt sense. That is hard to say. I have decided to tell you what took place among us eight thousand years ago."

"I would be grateful."

"WE LIVE in contentment. Maybe it is good, maybe it is not so good. But we continue to live. Where did our trouble come from in the old days, when we were like your race? Back when we were brash and young and wickedly cruel? From the individuals, those driven ones who were motivated to succeed despite all obstacles. They made our paintings, wrote our music, killed each other, fomented our unrest, our wars. We live off the bewildering richness of our past."

He sighed. "It was a problem. To understand our solution, you must think of an analogy, Man Lambert. Think of a factory where machines are made. We will call the acceptable machines stable, the unacceptable ones unstable. They are built with a flywheel which must turn at a certain speed. If it exceeds that speed, it is no good. But a machine that is stable can, at any time, become unstable. What is the solution?" He smiled at Lambert.

"I'm a bit confused," Lambert confessed. "You would have to go around inspecting the machines constantly for stability."

"And use a gauge? No. Too much trouble. An unstable machine can do damage. So we do this—we

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put a little governor on the machine. When the speed passes the safety mark, the machine breaks."

"But this is an analogy, Vonk Soobuknoora!" Lambert protested. "You can't put a governor on a man!"

"Man is born with a governor, Man Lambert. Look back in both our histories, when we were not much above the animal level. An unbalanced man would die. He could not compete for food. He could not organize the simple things of his life for survival. Man Lambert, did you ever have a fleeting impulse to kill yourself?"

Lambert smiled. "Of course. You could almost call that impulse a norm for intelligent species."

"Did it ever go far enough so that you considered a method, a weapon?"

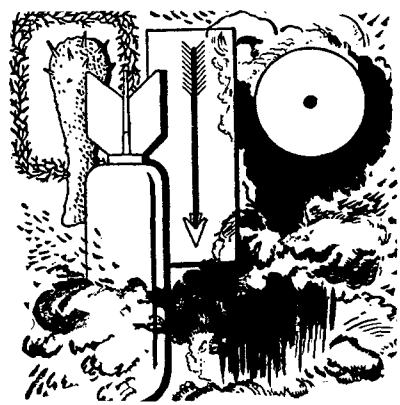
Lambert nodded slowly. "It's hard to remember, but I think I did. Yes, once I did."

"And what would have happened," the Argonaut asked softly, "if there had been available to you in that moment a weapon completely painless, completely final?"

LAMBERT'S mouth went dry. "I would probably have used it. I was very young. Wait! I'm beginning to see what you mean, but—"

"The governor had to be built into the body," Soobuknoora interrupted, "and yet so designed that there would be no possibility of accidental activation. Suppose that on this day I start to think of how great and powerful I am in this position I have. I get an enormous desire to become even more powerful. I begin to reason emotionally. Soon I have a setback. I am depressed. I am out of balance, you could say. I have become dangerous to myself and to our culture.

"In a moment of depression, I take these two smallest fingers of each hand. I reach behind me and I press the two fingers, held firmly together, to a space in the middle of my back. A tiny capsule buried at the base of my brain is activated and I am dead within a thousandth



part of a second. Vonk Poogla is the same. All of us are the same. The passing urge for self-destruction happens to be the common denominator of imbalance. We purged our race of the influence of the neurotic, the egocentric, the hypersensitive, merely by making

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self-destruction very, very easy."

"Then that death rate—?"

"At eighteen the operation is performed. It is very quick and very simple. We saw destruction ahead. We had to force it through. In the beginning the deaths were frightening, there were so many of them. The stable ones survived, bred, reproduced. A lesser but still great percentage of the next generation went—and so on, until now it is almost static."

In Argonian Lambert said hotly, "Oh, it sounds fine! But what about children? What sort of heartless race can plant the seed of death in its own children?"

NEVER before had he seen the faintest trace of anger on any Argonaut face. The single nostril widened and Soobuknoora might have raged if he had been from Earth. "There are other choices, Man Lambert. Our children have no expectation of being burned to cinder, blown to fragments. They are free of that fear. Which is the better love, Man Lambert?"

"I have two children. I couldn't bear to—"

"Wait!" Soobuknoora said. "Think one moment. Suppose you were to know that when they reached the age of eighteen, both your children were to be operated on by our methods. How would that affect your present relationship to them?"

Lambert was, above all, a realist. He remembered the days of being "too busy" for the children, of passing off their serious questions with a joking or curt evasion, of playing with them as though they were young, pleasing, furry animals.

"I would do a better job as a parent," Lambert admitted. "I would try to give them enough emotional stability so that they would never—have that urge to kill themselves. But Ann is delicate, moody, unpredictable, artistic."

Poogla and Soobuknoora nodded in unison. "You would probably lose that one; maybe you would lose both," Soobuknoora agreed. "But it is better to lose more than half the children of a few generations to save the race."

Lambert thought some more. He said, "I shall go back and I shall speak of this plan and what it did for you. But I do not think my race will like it. I do not want to insult you or your people, but you have stagnated. You stand still in time."

Vonk Poogla laughed largely. "Not by a damn sight," he said gleefully. "Next year we stop giving the operation. We stop for good. It was just eight thousand years to permit us to catch our breath before going on more safely. And what is eight thousand years of marking time in the history of a race? Nothing, my friend. Nothing!"

When Lambert went back to Earth, he naturally quit his job.

—JOHN D. MacDONALD

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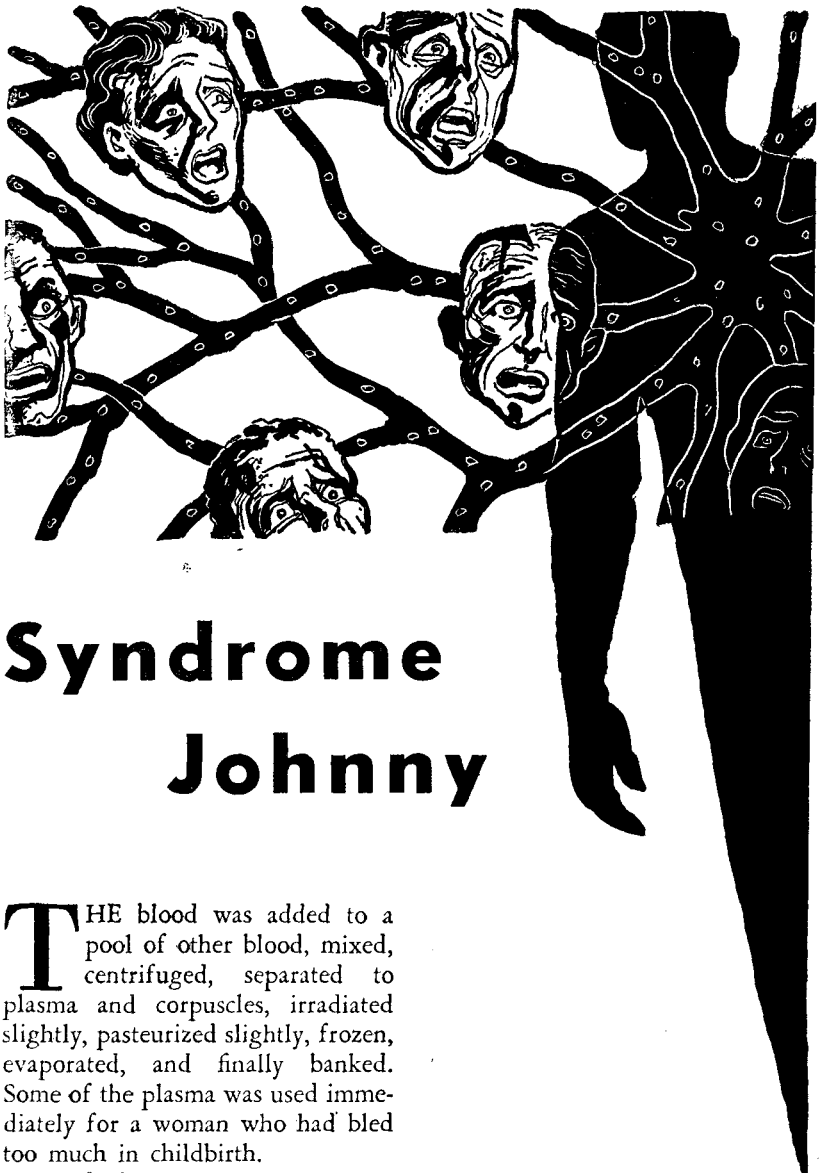

Syndrome Johnny

THE blood was added to a pool of other blood, mixed, centrifuged, separated to plasma and corpuscles, irradiated slightly, pasteurized slightly, frozen, evaporated, and finally banked. Some of the plasma was used immediately for a woman who had bled too much in childbirth.

She died.

Others received plasma and did

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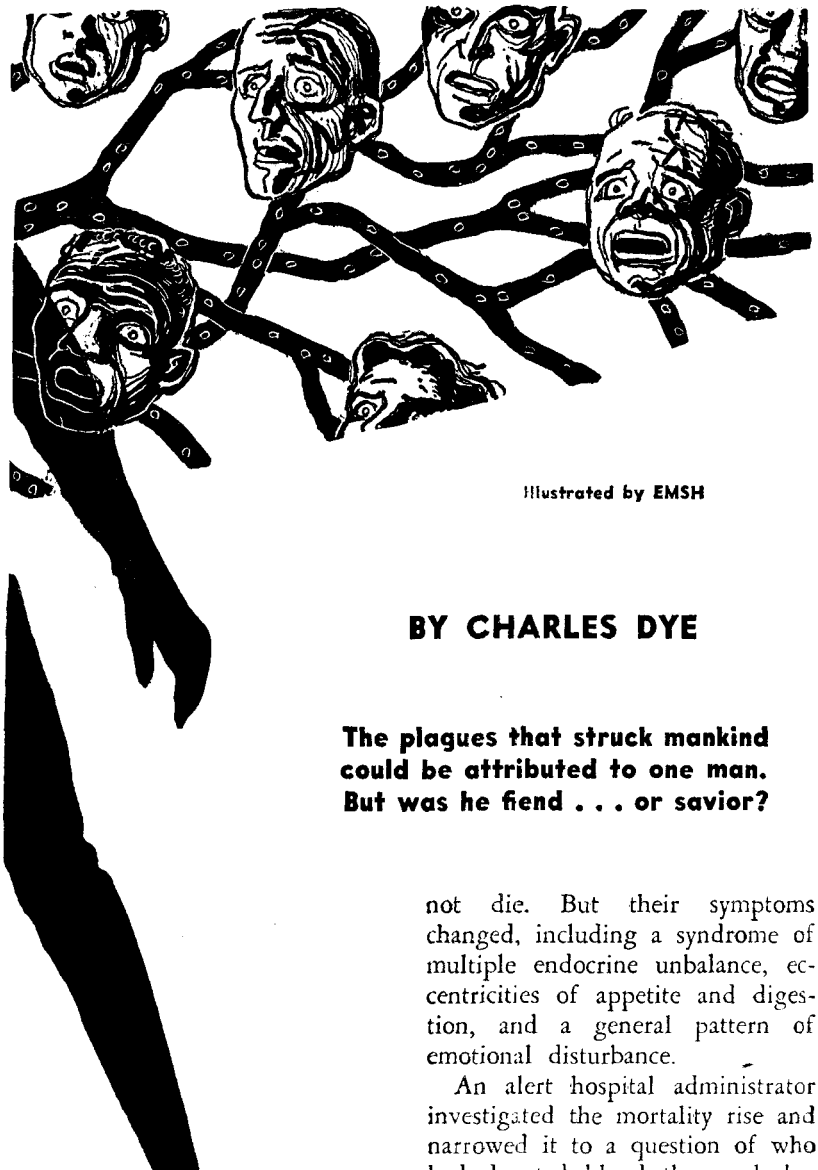

Illustrated by EMSH

BY CHARLES DYE

The plagues that struck mankind could be attributed to one man. But was he fiend . . . or savior?

not die. But their symptoms changed, including a syndrome of multiple endocrine unbalance, eccentricities of appetite and digestion, and a general pattern of emotional disturbance.

An alert hospital administrator investigated the mortality rise and narrowed it to a question of who had donated blood the week before. After city residents were

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eliminated, there remained only the signed receipts and thumbprints of nine men. Nine healthy unregistered travelers poor enough to sell their blood for money, and among them a man who carried death in his veins. The nine thumbprints were broadcast to all police files and a search began.

The effort was futile, for there were many victims who had sickened and grown partially well again without recognizing the strangeness of their illness.

Three years later they reached the carrier stage and the epidemic spread to four cities. Three more years, and there was an epidemic which spread around the world, meeting another wave coming from the opposite direction. It killed two out of four, fifty out of a hundred, twenty-seven million out of fifty million. There was hysteria where it appeared. And where it had not appeared there were quarantines to fence it out. But it could not be fenced out. For two years it covered the world. And then it vanished again, leaving the survivors with a tendency toward glandular troubles.

Time passed. The world grew richer, more orderly, more peaceful.

A man paused in the midst of his work at the U.N. Food and Agriculture Commission. He looked up at the red and green production map of India.

"Just too many people per acre," he said. "All our work at improving production . . . just one jump ahead of their rising population, one jump ahead of famine. Sometimes I wish to God there would be another plague to give us a breathing spell and a fair chance to get things organized."

He went back to work and added another figure.

Two months later, he was one of the first victims of the second plague.

IN THE dining hall of a university, a biochemical student glanced up from his paper to his breakfast companion. "You remember Johnny, the mythical carrier that they told about during the first and second epidemics of Syndrome Plague?"

"Sure. Syndrome Johnny. They use that myth in psychology class as a typical example of mass hysteria. When a city was nervous and expecting the plague to reach them, some superstitious fool would imagine he saw Syndrome Johnny and the population would panic. Symbol for Death or some such thing. People imagined they saw him in every corner of the world. Simultaneously, of course."

It was a bright morning and they were at a window which looked out across green rolling fields to a towering glass-brick building in the distance.

The student who had gone back to his paper suddenly looked up

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again. "Some Peruvians here claim they saw Syndrome Johnny—"

"Idiotic superstition! You'd think it would have died down when the plague died."

The other grinned. "The plague didn't die." He folded his newspaper slowly, obviously advancing an opening for a debate.

His companion went on eating. "Another of your wild theories, huh?" Then through a mouthful of food: "All right, if the plague didn't die, where did it go?"

"Nowhere. *We have it now.* We all have it!" He shrugged. "A virus catalyst of high affinity for the cells and a high similarity to a normal cell protein—how can it be detected?"

"Then why don't people die? Why aren't we sick?"

"Because we have sickened and recovered. We caught it on conception and recovered before birth. Proof? Why do you think that the countries which were known as the Hungry Lands are now well-fed, leisured, educated, advanced? Because the birth rate has fallen! Why has the birth rate fallen?" He paused, then very carefully said, "Because two out of three of all people who would have lived have died before birth, slain by Syndrome Plague. We are all carriers now, hosts to a new guest. And"—his voice dropped to a mock sinister whisper—"with such a stranger within our cells, at the heart of the intricate machinery of our lives, who knows what subtle changes have crept upon us unnoticed!"

His companion laughed. "Eat your breakfast. You belong on a horror program!"

A POLICE psychologist for the Federated States of The Americas was running through reports from the Bureau of Social Statistics. Suddenly he grunted, then a moment later said, "Uh-huh!"

"Uh-huh what?" asked his superior, who was reading a newspaper with his feet up on the desk.

"Remember the myth of Syndrome Johnny?"

"Ghost of Syndrome Plague. Si, what of it?"

"Titaquahapahel, Peru, population nine hundred, sent in a claim that he turned up there and they almost caught him. Crime Statistics rerouted the report to Mass Phenomena, of course. Mass Phenomena blew a tube and sent their folder on Syndrome Johnny over here. Every report they ever had on him for ninety years back! A memo came with it." He handed the memo over.

The man behind the desk looked at it. It was a small graph and some mathematical symbols. "What is it?"

"It means," said the psychologist, smiling dryly, "that every crazy report about our ghost has points of similarity to every other crazy

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report. The whole business of Syndrome Johnny has been in their 'funny coincidence' file for twenty years. This time the suspect hits the averaged description of Johnny too closely: A solid-looking man, unusual number of visible minor scars, and a disturbing habit of bending his fingers at the first-joint knuckles when he is thinking. The coincidence has gotten too damn funny. There's a chance we've been passing up a crime."

"An extensive crime," said the man at the desk softly. He reached for the folder. "Yes, a considerable quantity of murder." He leafed through the folder and then thought a while, looking at the most recent reports. Thinking was what he was paid for, and he earned his excellent salary.

"This thumbprint on the hotel register—the name is false, but the thumbprint looks real. Could we persuade the Bureau of Records to give their data on that print?"

"Without a warrant? Against constitutional immunity. No, not a chance. The public has been touchy about the right to secrecy ever since that police state was attempted in Varga."

"How about persuading an obliging judge to give a warrant on grounds of reasonable suspicion?"

"No. We'd have the humanist press down on our necks in a minute, and any judge knows it. We'd have to prove a crime was committed. No crime, no warrant."

"It seems a pity we can't even find out who the gentleman is," the Crimes Department head murmured, looking at the thumbprint wistfully. "No crime, no records. No records, no evidence. No evidence, no proof of crime. Therefore, we must manufacture a small crime. He was attacked and he must have defended himself. Someone may have been hurt in the process." He pushed a button. "Do you think if I send a man down there, he could persuade one of the mob to swear out a complaint?"

"That's a rhetorical question," said the psychologist, trying to work out an uncertain correlation in his reports. "With that sort of mob hysteria, the town would probably give you an affidavit of witchcraft."

"PHONE for you, Doctor Alcala." The nurse was crisp but quiet, smiling down at the little girl before vanishing again.

Ricardo Alcala pushed the plunger in gently, then carefully withdrew the hypodermic needle from the little girl's arm. "There you are, Cosita," he said, smiling and rising from the chair beside the white bed.

"Will that make me better, Doctor?" she piped feebly.

He patted her hand. "Be a good girl and you will be well tomorrow." He walked out into the hospital corridor to where the desk nurse held out a phone.

"Alcala speaking."

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The voice was unfamiliar. "My deepest apologies for interrupting your work, Doctor. At this late hour I'm afraid I assumed you would be at home. The name is Camba, Federation Investigator on a health case. I would like to consult you."

Alcala was tired, but there was nothing to do at home. Nita was at the health resort and Johnny had borrowed all his laboratory space for a special synthesis of some sort, and probably would be too busy even to talk. Interest stirred in him. This was a Federation investigator calling; the man's work was probably important. "Tonight, if that's convenient. I'll be off duty in five minutes."

Thirty minutes later they were ordering in a small cantina down the street from the hospital.

Julio Camba, Federation Investigator, was a slender, dark man with sharp, glinting eyes. He spoke with a happy theatrical flourish.

"Order what you choose, Senor. We're on my expense account. The resources of the Federated States of all The Americas stand behind your menu."

Alcala smiled. "I wouldn't want to add to the national debt."

"Not at all, Senor. The Federated States are only too happy thus to express a fraction of their gratitude by adding a touch of luxury to the otherwise barren and self-sacrificing life of a scientist."

"You shame me," Alcala said dryly. It was true that he needed every spare penny for the health of Nita and the child, and for the laboratory. A penny saved from being spent on nourishment was a penny earned. He picked up the menu again and ordered steak.

The investigator lit a cigar, asking casually: "Do you know John Osborne Drake?"

ALCALA searched his memory. "No. I'm sorry . . ." Then he felt for the first time how closely he was being watched, and knew how carefully his reaction and the tone of his voice had been analyzed. The interview was dangerous. For some reason, he was suspected of something.

Camba finished lighting the cigar and dropped the match into an ashtray. "Perhaps you know John Delgados?" He leaned back into the shadowy corner of the booth.

Johnny! Out of all the people in the world, how could the government be interested in him? Alcala tried to sound casual. "An associate of mine. A friend."

"I would like to contact the gentleman." The request was completely unforceful, undemanding. "I called, but he was not at home. Could you tell me where he might be?"

"I'm sorry, Senor Camba, but I cannot say. He could be on a business trip." Alcala was feeling increasingly nervous. Actually, Johnny was working at his laboratory.

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"What do you know of his activities?" Camba asked.

"A biochemist." Alcala tried to see past the meditative mask of the thin dark face. "He makes small job-lots of chemical compounds. Special bug spray for sale to experimental plantations, hormone spray for fruits, that sort of thing. Sometimes, when he collects some money ahead, he does research."

Camba waited, and his silence became a question. Alcala spoke reluctantly, anger rising in him. "Oh, it's genuine research. He has some patents and publications to his credit. You can confirm that if you choose." He was unable to keep the hostility out of his voice.

A waiter came and placed steaming platters of food on the table. Camba waited until he was gone. "You know him well, I presume. Is he sane?"

The question was another shock. Alcala thought carefully, for any man might be insane in secret. "Yes, so far as I know." He turned his attention to the steak, but first took three very large capsules from a bottle in his pocket.

"I would not expect that a doctor would need to take pills," Camba remarked with friendly mockery.

"I don't need them," Alcala explained. "Mixed silicones. I'm guinea pigging."

"Can't such things be left to the guinea pigs?" Camba asked, watch-

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ing with revulsion as Alcala uncapped the second bottle and sprinkled a layer of gray powder over his steak.

"Guinea pigs have no assimilation of silicones; onlv man has that."

"Yes, oi course. I should have remembered from your famous papers, *The Need Of Trace Silicon In Human Diet* and *Silicon Deficiency Diseases.*"

OBVIOUSLY Camba had done considerable investigating of Alcala before approaching him. He had even given the titles of the research papers correctly. Alcala's wariness increase

"What is the purpose of the experiment this time?" asked the small dark Federation agent genially.

"To determine the safe limits of silicon consumption and if there are any dangers in an overdose."

"How do you determine that? By dropping dead?"

He could be right. Perhaps the test should be stopped. Every day, with growing uneasiness, Alcala took his dose of silicon compound, and every day, the chemical seemed to be absorbed completely—not released or excreted—in a way that was unpleasantly reminiscent of the way arsenic accumulated without evident damage, then killed abruptly without warning.

Already, this evening, he had noticed that there was something faulty about his coordination and weight and surface sense. The restaurant door had swung back with a curious lightness, and the hollow metal handle had had a curious softness under his fingers. Something merely going wrong with the sensitivity of his fingers—?

He tapped his fingertips on the heavy indestructible silicone plastic table top. There was a feeling of heaviness in his hands, and a feeling of faint rubbery *give* in the table.

Tapping his fingers gently, his heavy fingers . . . the answer was dreamily fantastic. *I'm turning into silicon plastic myself,* he thought. But how, why? He had not bothered to be curious before, but the question had always been—what were supposedly insoluble silicons doing assimilating into the human body at all?

Several moments passed. He smoothed back his hair with his oddly heavy hand before picking up his fork again.

"I'm turning into plastic," he told Camba.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing. A joke."

Camba was turning into plastic, too. Everyone was. But the effect was accumulating slowly, by generations.

CAMBA lay down his knife and started in again. "What connections have you had with John Delgados?"

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Concentrate on the immediate situation. Alcala and Johnny were obviously in danger of some sort of mistaken arrest and interrogation.

As Alcala focused on the question, one errant whimsical thought suddenly flitted through the back of his mind. In red advertising letters: TRY OUR NEW MODEL RUST-PROOF, WATERPROOF, HEAT & SCALD RESISTANT, STRONG —EXTRA - LONG - WEARING HUMAN BEING!

He laughed inwardly and finally answered: "Friendship. Mutual interest in high ion colloidial suspensions and complex synthesis." Impatience suddenly mastered him. "Exactly what is it you wish to know, Senor? Perhaps I could inform you if I knew the reasons for your interest."

Camba chose a piece of salad with great care. "We have reason to believe that he is Syndrome Johnny."

Alcala waited for the words to clarify. After a moment, it ceased to be childish babble and became increasingly shocking. He remembered the first time he had met John Delgados, the smile, the strong handclasp. "Call me Johnny," he had said. It had seemed no more than a nickname.

The investigator was watching his expression with bright brown eyes.

Johnny, yes . . . but not Syndrome Johnny. He tried to think of some quick refutation. "The whole thing is preposterous, Senor Camba. The myth of Syndrome Plague Johnny started about a century ago."

"Doctor Alcala"—the small man in the gray suit was tensely sober—"John Delgados is very old, and John Delgados is not his proper name. I have traced his life back and back, through older and older records in Argentina, Panama, South Africa, the United States, China, Canada. Everywhere he has paid his taxes properly, put his fingerprints on file as a good citizen should. And he changed his name every twenty years, applying to the courts for permission with good honest reasons for changing his name. Everywhere he has been a laboratory worker, held patents, sometimes made a good deal of money. He is one hundred and forty years old. His first income tax was paid in 1970, exactly one hundred and twenty years ago."

"Other men are that old," said Alcala.

"Other men are old, yes. Those who survived the two successive plagues were unusually durable." Camba finished and pushed back his plate. "There is no crime in being long-lived, surely. But he has changed his name five times!"

"That proves nothing. Whatever his reasons for changing his name, it doesn't prove that he is Syndrome Johnny any more than it proves he is the cow that jumped over the

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moon. Syndrome Johnny is a myth, a figment of mob delirium."

AS HE said it, he knew it was not true. A Federation investigator would not be on a wild goose chase.

The plates were taken away and cups of steaming black coffee put between them. He would have to warn Johnny. It was strange how well you could know a man as well as he knew Johnny, firmly enough to believe that, despite evidence, everything the man did was right.

"Why must it be a myth?" Camba asked softly.

"It's ridiculous!" Alcala protested. "Why would any man—" His voice cut off as unrelated facts fell into a pattern. He sat for a moment, thinking intensely, seeing the century of plague as something he had never dreamed . . .

A price.

Not too high a price in the long run, considering what was purchased. Of course, the great change over into silicon catalysis would be a shock and require adjustment and, of course, the change must be made in several easy stages—and those who could not adjust would die.

"Go on, Doctor," Camba urged softly. "'*Why* would any man—'"

He tried to find a way of explaining which would not seem to have any relationship to John Delgados. "It has been recently discovered"—but he did not say *how* recently—"that the disease of Syndrome Plague was not a disease. It is an improvement." He had spoken clumsily.

"An improvement on life?" Camba laughed and nodded, but there were bitterness and anger burning behind the small man's smile. "People can be improved to death by the millions. Yes, yes, go on, Senor. You fascinate me."

"We are stronger," Alcala told him. "We are changed chemically. The race has been improved!"

"Come, Doctor Alcala," Camba said with a sneering merriment, "the Syndrome Plagues have come and they have gone. Where is this change?"

Alcala tried to express it clearly. "We are stronger. Potentially, we are tremendously stronger. But we of this generation are still weak and ill, as our parents were, from the shock of the change. And we need silicone feeding; we have not adjusted yet. Our illness masks our strength." He thought of what that strength would be!

Camba smiled and took out a small notebook. "The disease is connected with silicones, you say? The original name of John Delgados was John Osborne Drake. His father was Osborne Drake, a chemist at Dow Corning, who was sentenced to the electric chair in 1967 for unauthorized bacterial experiments which resulted in an accidental epidemic and eight deaths. Dow Corning was the first major manufactury of silicones in Amer-

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ica, though not connected in any way with Osborne Drake's criminal experiments. It links together, does it not?"

"It is not a disease, it is strength!" Alcala insisted doggedly.

THE small investigator looked up from his notebook and his smile was an unnatural thing, a baring of teeth. "Half the world died of this strength, Senor. If you will not think of the men and women, think of the children. Millions of children died!"

The waiter brought the bill, dropping it on the table between them.

"Lives will be saved in the long run," Alcala said obstinately. "Individual deaths are not important in the long run."

"That is hardly the philosophy for a doctor, is it?" asked Camba with open irony, taking the bill and rising.

They went out of the restaurant in silence. Camba's 'copter stood at the curb.

"Would you care for a lift home, Doctor Alcala?" The offer was made with the utmost suavity.

Alcala hesitated fractionally. "Why, yes, thank you." It would not do to give the investigator any reason for suspicion by refusing.

As the 'copter lifted into the air, Camba spoke with a more friendly note in his voice, as if he humored a child. "Come, Alcala, you're a doctor dedicated to saving lives. How can you find sympathy for a murderer?"

Alcala sat in the dark, looking through the windshield down at the bright street falling away below. "I'm not a practicing medico; only one night a week do I come to the hospital. I'm a research man. I don't try to save individual lives. I'm dedicated to improving the average life, the average health. Can you understand that? Individuals may be sick and individuals may die, but the average lives on. And if the average is better, then I'm satisfied."

The 'copter flew on. There was no answer.

"I'm not good with words," said Alcala. Then, taking out his penknife and unfolding it, he said, "Watch!" He put his index finger on the altimeter dial, where there was light, and pressed the blade against the flesh between his finger and his thumb. He increased the pressure until the flesh stood out white on either side of the blade, bending, but not cut.

"Three generations back, this pressure would have gone right through the hand." He took away the blade and there was only a very tiny cut. Putting the knife away, he brought out his lighter. The blue flame was steady and hot. Alcala held it close to the dashboard and put his finger directly over it, counting patiently, "One, two, three, four, five—" He pulled the lighter back, snapping it shut.

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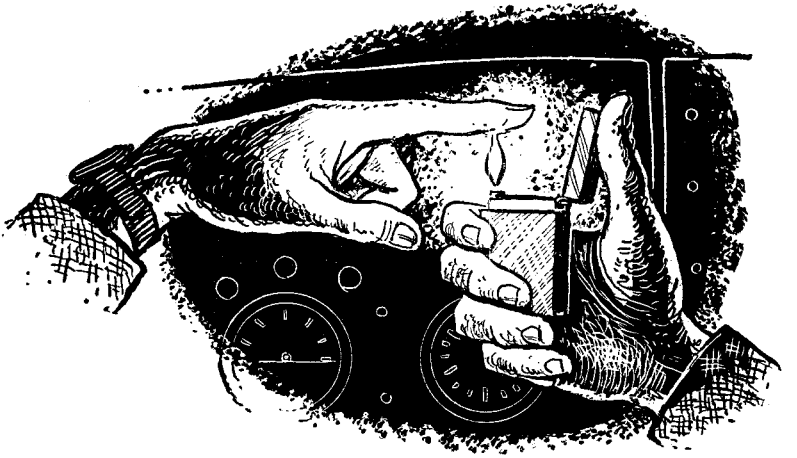

"Three generations ago, a man couldn't have held a finger over that flame for more than a tenth part of that count. Doesn't all this prove something to you?"

The 'copter was hovering above Alcala's house. Camba lowered it to the ground and opened the door before answering. "It proves only that a good and worthy man will cut and burn his hand for an unworthy friendship. Good night."

Disconcerted, Alcala watched the 'copter lift away into the night, then, turning, saw that the lights were still on in the laboratory. Camba might have deduced something from that, if he knew that Nita and the girl were not supposed to be home.

Alcala hurried in.

Johnny hadn't left yet. He was sitting at Alcala's desk with his feet on the wastebasket, the way Alcala often liked to sit, reading a technical journal. He looked up, smiling. For a moment Alcala saw him with the new clarity of a stranger. The lean, weathered face; brown eyes with smile deltas at the corners; wide shoulders; steady, big hands holding the magazine—solid, able, and ruthless enough to see what had to be done, and do it.

"I was waiting for you, Ric."

"The Feds are after you." Ricardo Alcala had been running. He found he was panting and his heart was pounding.

Delgados' smile did not change. "It's all right, Ric. Everything's done. I can leave any time now." He indicated a square metal box standing in a corner. "There's the stuff."

What stuff? The product Johnny had been working on? "You haven't time for that now, Johnny.

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You can't sell it. They'd watch for anyone of your description selling chemicals. Let me loan you some money."

"Thanks." Johnny was smiling oddly. "Everything's set. I won't need it. How close are they to finding me?"

"They don't know where you're staying." Alcala leaned on the desk edge and put out his hand. "They tell me you're Syndrome Johnny."

"I thought you'd figured that one out." Johnny shook his hand formally. "The name is John Osborne Drake. You aren't horrified?"

"No." Alcala knew that he was shaking hands with a man who would be thanked down all the successive generations of mankind. He noticed again the odd white webwork of scars on the back of Johnny's hand. He indicated them as casually as he could. "Where did you pick those up?"

JOHN DRAKE glanced at his hand. "I don't know, Ric. Truthfully. I've had my brains beaten in too often to remember much any more. Unimportant. There are instructions outlining plans and methods filed in safety deposit boxes in almost every big city in the world. Always the same typing, always the same instructions. I can't remember who typed them, myself or my father, but I must have been expected to forget or they wouldn't be there. Up to eleven, my memory is all right, but after Dad started to remake me, everything gets fuzzy."

"After he did *what?*"

Johnny smiled tiredly and rested his head on one hand. "He had to remake me chemically, you know. How could I spread change without being changed myself? I couldn't have two generations to adapt to it naturally like you, Ric. It had to be done artificially. It took years. You understand? I'm a community, a construction. The cells that carry on the silicon metabolism in me are not human. Dad adapted them for the purpose. I helped, but I can't remember any longer how it was done. I think when I've been badly damaged, organization scatters to the separate cells in my body. They can survive better that way, and they have powers of regrouping and healing. But memory can't be pasted together again or regrown."

John Drake rose and looked around the laboratory with something like triumph. "They're too late. I made it, Ric. There's the catalyst cooling over there. This is the last step. I don't think I'll survive this plague, but I'll last long enough to set it going for the finish. The police won't stop me until it's too late."

ANOTHER plague!

The last one had been before Alcala was born. He had not thought that Johnny would start another. It was a shock.

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Alcala walked over to the cage where he kept his white mice and looked in, trying to sort out his feelings. The white mice looked back with beady bright eyes, caged, not knowing they were waiting to be experimented upon.

A timer clicked and John Delgados-Drake became all rapid efficient activity, moving from valve to valve. It lasted a half minute or less, then Drake had finished stripping off the lab whites to his street clothes. He picked up the square metal box containing the stuff he had made, tucked it under his arm and held out a solid hand again to Alcala.

"Good-by, Ric. Wish me luck. Close up the lab for me, will you?"

Alcala took the hand numbly and mumbled something, turned back to the cages and stared blindly at the mice. Drake's brisk footsteps clattered down the stairs.

ANOTHER step forward for the human race.

God knew what wonders for the race were in that box. Perhaps something for nerve construction, something for the mind—the last and most important step. He should have asked.

There came at last a pressure that was a thought emerging from the depth of intuition. *Doctor Ricardo Alcala will die in the next plague, he and his ill wife Nita and his ill little girl . . . And the name of Alcala will die forever as a weak strain blotted from the bloodstream of the race . . .*

He'd find out what was in the box by dying of it!

He tried to reason it out, but only could remember that Nita, already sickly, would have no chance. And Alcala's family genes, in attempting to adapt to the previous steps, had become almost sterile. It had been difficult having children. The next step would mean complete sterility. The name of Alcala would die. The future might be wonderful, but it would not be *his* future!

"Johnny!" he called suddenly, something like an icy lump hardening in his chest. How long had it been since Johnny had left?

Running, Alcala went down the long half-lit stairs, out the back door and along the dark path toward the place where Johnny's 'copter had been parked.

A light shone through the leaves. It was still there.

"Johnny!"

John Osborne Drake was putting his suitcase into the rear of the 'copter.

"What is it, Ric?" he asked in a friendly voice without turning.

It would be impossible to ask him to change his mind. Alcala found a rock, raised it behind Syndrome Johnny's back. "I know I'm being anti-social," he said regretfully, and then threw the rock away.

His fist was enough like stone to crush a skull.

—CHARLES DYE

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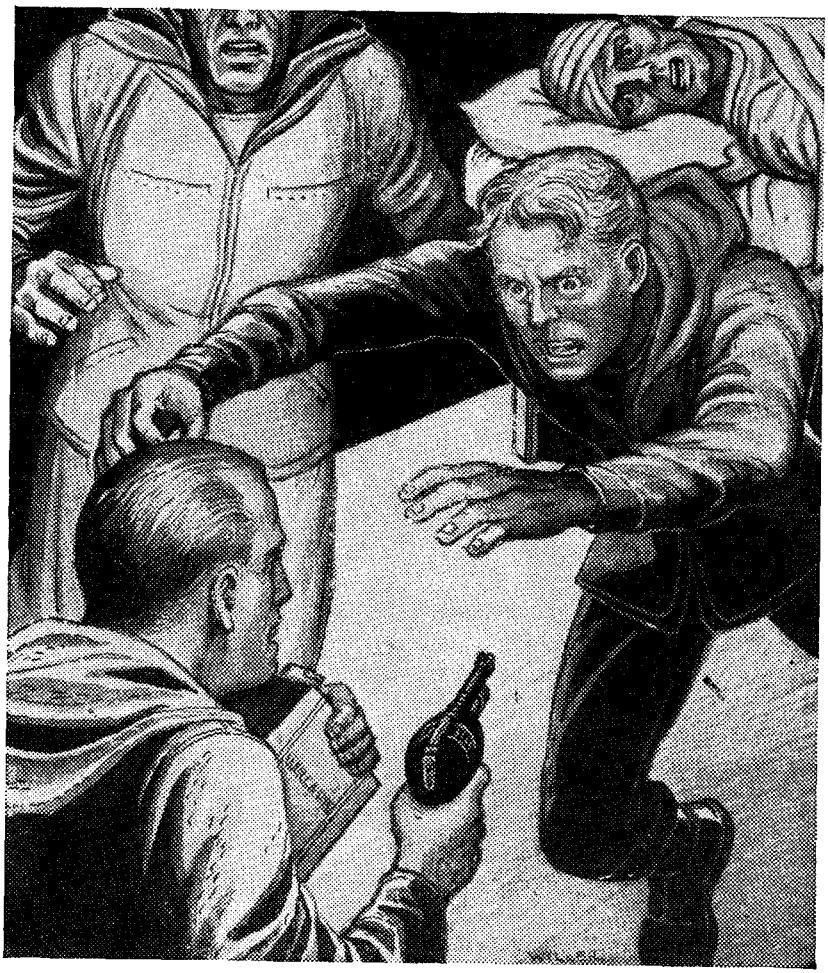
MARS CHILD

BY CYRIL JUDD

CONCLUSION OF 3-PART SERIAL



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Illustrated by WILLER

The Martian colonists had tried hard work, stubbornness, political pull to save their colony from death. Only a miracle was left!

SYNOPSIS

FORTY years have passed since the first rocket crashed on Mars: and now, for the first time, the ancient planet shows some promise of becoming a real home for men. Sun Lake City Colony, established fourteen months ago, is unique on Mars: a cooperative, without industrial backing, designed for permanence rather than profit. Its members range from unskilled laborers to accomplished scientists, with one conviction in common, that Earth is through as a habitation for man, because of its wrecked ecology, overcrowding, and the inevitability of a cataclysmic radiological war.

In the Sun Lake Laboratory, radioisotopes are produced from Mars' naturally low-radioactive soil, for export to Earth. But the Colony's goal is independence, and this trade will cease as soon as an agricultural cycle can be established, and when an acceptable substitute is found for Earth-import OxEn—

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the "oxygen enzyme" pills that enable humans to breathe Mars air.

One of the few qualifications for residence in Sun Lake is the "M or M" ruling; all members must be either married or marriageable. JIM and POLLY KANDRO came to the Colony partly to get away from the scene of half a dozen tragic miscarriages on Earth, so there is double cause for celebration when the first baby actually conceived in the Colony is born to Polly.

The birth is attended by the Sun Lake doctor, TONY HELLMAN, in his one room rammed "earth" hospital. At thirty-two, Tony is one of the older scientists, although still unmarried. He is a member of the Colony Council, and is also the Lab's radiological safety monitor. Since OxEn cannot be absorbed by infants, the doctor fits the new baby with a specially designed oxygen mask. The baby is named SUN LAKE CITY COLONY KANDRO—"Sunny" for short.

But the Colony is visited by HAMILTON BELL, Planetary Affairs Commissioner on Mars for the PanAmerican World Federation. Bell is acting on a complaint made by HUGO BRENNER, notoriously wealthy drug manufacturer; 100 kilograms of marcaine have been stolen; the "scent" was traced to the Colony with an electronic device known as the "Bloodhound."

Commissioner Bell now proposes to conduct a ruinous search, which would destroy delicate equipment and contaminate ready-to-go shipments. The colonists bargain with him, and accept a desperate alternative. They may conduct their own search, but if they fail to deliver up thief and marcaine both by Shipment Day, the Colony will be sealed off by a military cordon for six months to permit an official search. Sun Lake's economy could not possibly survive such a blow.

Tony meets with the other members of the Colony Council; black-haired, sharp-eyed MIMI JONATHAN, formerly a top-flight insurance executive, now Lab Administrator; JOE GRACEY, senior agronomist at Sun Lake, once a college professor; and NICK CANTRELLA, an inspired engineer-without-degree, who found no way to utilize his talents on Earth.

Electro-encephalograph tests are given the entire community, to test for the characteristic brain-waves of marcaine usage. The results are negative. The colonists attempt to procure a "Bloodhound," but Bell refuses them the use of police equipment. They lay plans for the difficult job of searching the Colony without one.

All the while, the doctor has his own work to do. Sunny has trouble suckling, and Polly, after her years of waiting, is overanxious. The doctor becomes seriously worried about her when her hysteria produces hallucinations about "Brownies," a

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legendary native life-form, supposed to look much like the Earth-side story book creatures, and reported to steal human babies for ritual feasts.

Another problem patient is Joan Radcliff, who is dying of a mysterious Martian ailment which Tony cannot even diagnose, let alone treat. She refuses to return to Earth partly because of her intense idealism about the Colony; partly because of her husband, HANK RADCLIFF, a romantic youngster, whose life-dream was to come to Mars. If Joan leaves, he must go too. And if Bell's ultimatum means the end of Sun Lake, it will break both their hearts—but save Joan's life.

An added problem is ANNA WILLENDORF, the doctor's part-time assistant and nurse. A quiet, unobtrusive person, she came to the Colony as a glassblower, but now has her working equipment set up next to the hospital, where she is always at hand. Her extraordinary empathy endears her to Tony, but he is not yet ready to tie himself to the Colony by marriage. Nor can he quite disregard the interest he feels in BEAU JUAREZ, the Colony's daredevil girl pilot.

But medical and personal problems both grow insignificant when the news is received that the Earth rocket is already in radio range—two weeks early.

There is now just one more week to Shipment Day!

Tony flies to Marsport with Bea to meet the rocket. There he is approached by Brenner, who offers him a fabulous salary to leave Sun Lake.

Tony indignantly refuses to doctor up drug addicts, and a brief scuffle ensues. Another industrialist, who has observed the scene, congratulates Tony on his stand, and hints at a frameup, with collusion between Bell and Brenner to get the Sun Lake Lab for the drug man.

Before the doctor can digest this news, a new surprise is thrust on him. Among the rocket arrivals is DOUGLAS GRAHAM, a famous gunther who has come to write a book, "This Is Mars!"—and has chosen Sun Lake as his first stopping-point. The reporter gets his first look at Mars when a radio message requests the doctor to stop at Sun Lake's nearest neighbor, Pittco 3, to examine a seriously injured woman.

Tony arrives too late to help; "Big Ginny," an inmate of the Pittco company brothel, is dead, the victim of a clumsy attempt at self-abortion, followed by a vicious beating about the head, shoulders, and chest, and finished off by inept first aid.

Back at Sun Lake, Tony plunges into the job of monitoring the Lab search. He also finds himself elected host-in-chief to the reporter. When it becomes clear that no stolen marcaine is going to be

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found, Tony appeals to Graham for aid, for the reporter has a long-standing quarrel with Commissioner Bell.

Graham promises to write a smashing expose.

It comes as a brutal shock, then, when the doctor finds Polly ill from an overdose of marcaine. Graham's help has been won on the assumption that no marcaine could be found.

As a doctor, however, Tony's first concern must be the baby; Polly's milk now contains marcaine. In the early hours of the morning, Anna is routed out of bed to make bottles, and a lab technician to make plastic nipples. A formula is prepared, but the first bottle feeding offered to Sunny brings on a crisis. The baby has always had trouble suckling—this time, Sunny chokes, flushes a bright crimson, and seems to stop breathing altogether, at the just same instant that Anna, standing by, suddenly shrieks and falls into a dead faint.

Tony leaves the unconscious woman at the Kandros', and carries the baby back to his hospital room, determined to locate the trouble. After a careful examination and a sudden hunch, Tony tries a desperate experiment—he removes Sunny's mask. The baby immediately begins to breathe normally.

Earth air is too rich for him! Sunny is Marsworthy right from birth!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"SUNNY!" Polly ran to the table where Sunny still lay crying, wrapped in his blanket again, hungry, angry, and perfectly safe. "Doctor, what did you—how can he—?"

"He's fine," Tony assured her. "Just leave him alone. He's hungry, that's all."

Polly stared, fascinated by the naked-looking baby. "How *can* he breathe without a *mask?*"

"I don't know," Tony said bluntly, "but I tried it and it worked. I guess he's got naturally Marsworthy lungs. Seems to have been the only trouble he had."

"You mean—I thought Marsworthy lungs just meant you *could* breathe Mars air; people like that can breathe Earth air, too, can't they?"

Tony shrugged helplessly. He was licked and didn't care who knew it as long as Sunny was all right. For the time being, it was enough to know that the baby had been breathing through his mouth all along just because he *did* prefer Mars air. He got too much oxygen through the mask, so he didn't use his nose; a simple reversal of the theory on which the mask was based. When his source of Mars air was blocked—first by his mother's breast, and then, when he had learned to adapt to that, by the less flexible plastic nipple—he had to breathe the

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richer air through his nose, and he turned red, coughed, sputtered, and choked.

"I want to take him back now," said the doctor, "and try another feeding. Bet he'll eat right away." He picked up the baby, firmly refusing to surrender him to his mother, and led the way out of the hospital room and back to the Kandros' house.

Just before they left, Tony heard for the first time, consciously, the steady clicking of Graham's typewriter in the other part of the house. He realized it had been going almost continuously, and thought briefly of going inside to say hello, then decided against it. *I'll see him later on,* he thought *. . . I can explain everything then.* Obviously, the writer understood that an emergency was in progress, or else he was so busy himself that he didn't want to be bothered, either.

ii

JIM was thunderstruck by his maskless Sunny. Anna seemed to have recovered from her faint. She was a little pale, but otherwise normal, moving about briskly, picking up scattered blankets and baby equipment.

"I tried to make her rest," Jim explained, "but she said she felt fine."

"You take it easy, Anna," the doctor told her. "And I want to talk to you later—as soon as I'm finished with the baby."

"I'm perfectly all right," she insisted. "I can't imagine what made me do anything so foolish. I'm awfully sorry . . ."

"Polly, I want *you* to go to bed right away. You've had enough tonight—this morning, rather. Jim, you can handle the baby, can't you? You want to change him and get him ready for his feeding?"

Jim stooped over his son at the wall bunk, his big hands fumbling a little with closures on the small garments. Tony sat down and leaned back, closing his eyes. The baby screamed steadily, demanding nourishment.

"Doc, I still don't get it. How did you figure it out?"

Patiently, without opening his eyes, Tony repeated his explanation for Jim.

"I'll take your word for it," the man said finally, "but I'll be darned if I can understand it. Okay, Doc, I *guess* he's all fixed up."

Tony stood up. "Do you know how to fix a bottle? I'll show you."

"Here." Anna was at his elbow. "I thought you might want one," she said, as though apologizing, and handed it over.

"Thanks." Tony dashed a drop on his wrist—temperature just right—and passed it to Jim. "Let's try."

The big man, looking absurdly cautious, put the bottle to Sunny's mouth. Then he looked up, a tre-

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mendous grin on his face and his eyes a little wet. "How do you like that?" he said softly. The little mouth and jaw were working away busily; Sunny was feeding as though he'd been doing it for months.

They watched while he took a whole three and a half ounces, and then fell asleep, breathing quietly and regularly.

"A Mars child," said Anna gently, looking down at Sunny. "Jim, you have a real Mars child."

"Looks that way," said Kandro, beaming.

"Jim," said the doctor, "somebody ought to stay up and keep an eye on Sunny tonight, but I'm beat. And Polly's got to get some sleep. Will you do it?"

"Sure, Doc," said the father, not taking his happy eyes off the child.

"He'll probably need another feeding during the night. You know how to sterilize the bottle, and there's enough formula made up."

"Sure," said Jim. "You take care of Anna."

"I'll do that."

"Oh, Tony, I'm all right, I told you that—"

"You get your parka, Anna, and don't argue with the doctor," Tony told her. "I'm going to take you home and see if I can find out what made you pull that swoon. Come on . . . If you need me for anything, Jim, I'll be at Anna's or at home."

"I DO have a headache," she admitted when they reached her house. "Probably all I need is a little sleep. I haven't been living right." She tried a smile, but it didn't come off.

"None of us have," Tony reminded her. He studied her and decided against aspirin. He selected a strong sedative and shot it into her arm. Within a minute, she relaxed in a chair and exhaled long and gratefully. "Better," she said.

"Feel like talking?"

"I—I think I ought to sleep."

"Then just give me the bare facts." He ran his fingers over her head. "No blows. Was it a hangover?"

"Yes," she said defiantly.

"Very depraved. From the one drink you had with us?"

"From—from—Oh, hell!" That came from the heart, for Anna never swore.

"I've had enough mysteries for one night, Anna. Talk."

"Maybe I ought to," she said unwillingly. "Only a fool tells a lie to his doctor or the truth to his lawyer, and so on." She hesitated. "I've got a trick mind. All those people who think they're psychic—they are. I am, but more. It doesn't matter, does it?"

"Go on."

"I didn't know about it myself for a long time. It's not like mind-reading; it's not that clear. I was always—oh, sensitive, but I didn't understand it at first, and then later

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on it seemed to get more and more pronounced. I—haven't told anyone about it before. Not anyone at all."

She looked at him appealingly. Tony reassured her, "You know you can trust me."

"All right, I began to realize what it was when I was about twenty. That's why I became, of all things, a glassblower. If you had to listen to the moods and emotions of people, you'd want a job far away from everything in a one man department, too. That's why I came to Mars. It was too—too noisy on Earth."

"And that's why you're the best assistant I ever had, with or without an M.D. or R.N. on your name," said the doctor softly.

"You're easy to work with." She smiled. "Most of the time, it is. Sometimes, though, you get so *angry*—"

HE thought back, remembering the times she'd been there before he had called, or had left quickly when she was in the way, handed him what he needed before he actually *thought* about it.

"Please don't get upset about it, Tony. I'd hate to have to stop working with you now. I don't know what you *think*, just what you—*feel*, I guess. There are a lot of people like that, really; you must have sensed it in me a long time back. It isn't really so very strange," she pleaded. "I'm just a little—a little more that way, that's all."

"I don't see why I should get upset about it," he tried to soothe her, and realized sickeningly that it was a useless effort. He literally could not conceal his feelings this time. He stopped trying. "You must realize how hard I try not to show I'm even angry. It is a little disconcerting to find out—I'll get used to it. Just give me time." He was thoughtful for a moment. "How does it work? Do you know?"

"Not really. I 'hear' people's feelings. And—people seem to be more aware of my moods than they are of other people's. I—well, the way I first became aware of it was when somebody tried to—assault me, back on Earth, in Chicago. I was very young then, not quite twenty. It was one of those awful deserted streets, and he ran faster than I could and caught up with me. Something sort of turned on—I don't know how to say it. I was sending instead of receiving, but sending my emotion—which, naturally, was a violent mixture of fear and disgust—each more strongly than—than people usually can. I'm afraid I'm not making myself clear."

"No wonder," he said heavily. "The language isn't built for experiences like that. Go on."

"He fell down and flopped on the sidewalk like a fish, and I ran on and got to a busy street with-

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out looking back. I read the papers, but there wasn't anything about it, so I suppose he was all right afterward."

SHE stopped talking and jumped up restlessly. For quite a while she stood staring out of her window, toward the dark reaches of *Lacus Solis*.

Finally she said in a strained voice, "Please, Tony, it's not really as bad as that sounded. I can't send all the time; I can't do it mostly." She turned back to face him, and added more naturally: "Usually, people aren't as—open—as he was. And I guess I have to be pretty worked up, too. I tried to send tonight, and I couldn't do it. I tried awfully hard. That's why I had that headache."

"Tonight?"

"I'll tell you about that in a minute. Right now, I want—well, I told you I never told anyone about this before. It's important to me, Tony, *terribly* important, to make you understand. You're the first person I ever wanted to have understand it, and if you keep on being frightened or unhappy about it, I just don't know—"

She paused. "Let me tell you about it my way. I'll try to ignore whatever you feel while I'm telling it, and maybe when I'm done it will all be all right.

"When that happened in Chicago—what I told you about—I had a job in an office. There was a girl I had to work with who didn't like me. It was very unpleasant. Every day for a month I tried to turn that 'send-receive' switch and transmit a calm, happy feeling to her, but I never could make it work. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't get anything over to her. I knew what she felt, but her emotions were closed to mine. She didn't want to feel anything from me, so she didn't. Do you understand that? It's important, because it's true; you can protect yourself from that part of it. You believe me, don't you, Tony?"

He didn't answer right away. He had to be absolutely certain in his own mind, because she would know.

It would be far worse to tell her anything that wasn't true than to say nothing.

Finally he got up and walked over to her, but he didn't dare speak.

"Tony," she said, "you're—oh, please don't be embarrassed and difficult about it, but you're so *good!* That's what I meant, you're easy to work with. Most people are petty and a lot of them are mean. The things they feel aren't nice; they're mostly bitchy. But you—even when you're angry, it's a big, honest kind of anger. You don't want to hurt people, or get even, or take advantage of them. You're honest, and generous, and *good.* And now I've said too much!"

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He shook his head. "No, you didn't. It's all right. It really is."

There were tears shining in her eyes. Standing over her, he reached mechanically for a tissue from his bag, tilted her head up, and wiped her eyes as if she were a child.

"Now tell me more," he said, "and don't worry about how I feel. What happened tonight? Tell me about the headache. And the fainting—was that part of it too? Of course! What an idiot I am! The baby was choking and scared, and you screamed. You screamed and said to stop it."

"Did I? I wasn't sure whether I thought it or said it. That was strange, the whole business. It was terrible, somebody who hurt awfully all over and couldn't breathe, and was going to—to burst if he couldn't, and that didn't seem to make sense—and terribly hungry, and terribly frustrated, and—I didn't know who it was, because it was so strong. Babies don't have such 'loud' feelings. I guess it was the reflex of fear of dying, except Sunny is very loud, anyhow. When he was being born—"

SHE shuddered involuntarily. "I was awfully glad you didn't think to ask me to stay in there with you. When you sent Jim out, I talked to him, and sort of—concentrated on 'listening' to him, and then, with the door closed, it was all right. Anyhow, you want to know about tonight. The baby topped it off. I don't think that would have made me faint, by itself, but I was working in there, in the same room with Douglas Graham for an hour or more, and—"

"Graham!" Tony broke in. "Do you mean to say he *dared* to—"

"Why, Tony, I didn't know you cared!"

For the first time that evening, she laughed easily. Then, without giving him time to think about how his outburst had given him away, she added: "He didn't do anything. It was—it was about what he was writing, I *think*. I know what he was feeling. He was angry and disgusted and *contemptuous*. He hurt inside himself, and he felt the way people do when they hurt somebody else. And it seemed to be all tied up with the story he was writing. It was a story about the Colony, Tony, and I got worried and frightened. If only I could be sure. See, that's the trouble. I didn't know whether to tell somebody or not, and I tried and tried to 'send' to him, but he wasn't open at all, and the only thing that happened was that I got that headache."

"Then when you came over to the Kandros'," Tony finished for her, "and the baby had all that trouble, of course you couldn't take it. Tell me more about Graham. I understand that you're not sure; tell me what you *think*, and why."

"When Jim woke me up, we

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went back to your place together, and Graham was working there," she said. "He asked me what the excitement was all about and I told him. He listened, kept asking questions, got every little detail out of me, and all the time he was feeling that hurt and anger. Then I started to work and he began banging away on his typewriter. And those thoughts got stronger and stronger till they made me dizzy, and then I started trying to fight back, to send—and I couldn't. That's all there was to it."

"That's all? You're sure?"

She nodded.

"And you can't be certain what it was that he was feeling that way about?"

"How could I?"

"Well, then," he said, with a laugh of relief, "there's nothing at all to worry about. You made a natural enough mistake. Those feelings of his weren't directed *against* the Colony at all, Anna. Earlier tonight, after you left, Graham promised to help us. He was writing a story about the spot we're in, that's all, and I know that he felt all the things you've described, but not about us, about Bell." He sat a moment longer. "I'm sure of it, Anna. That's the only way it makes sense."

"It could be." She seemed a little dazed. "It didn't feel that way, but, of course, it could." She sighed and leaned back in her chair. "Oh, Tony, I'm so glad I told you. I didn't know *what* to do, and I was sure it was something vicious he was writing about the Colony."

"Well, you can relax now. Maybe I'll let you go to bed." He took her hands and pulled her to her feet. "We'll work it out, even if I have to take a few new experiences in stride. Believe me, we'll work it out."

She looked up at him, smiling gently. "I think so, too, Tony."

HE could have let her hands go, but he didn't. Instead, he flushed as he realized that even now she was aware of all his feelings. There were tears shining in her eyes again, and this time he couldn't reach for a tissue. He leaned down and kissed her damp eyelids; then he dropped one hand to brush away the moisture on her cheek.

A thousand thoughts raced through his mind. Earth, and Bell, and the Colony, now or forever or never. That time in the plane, thinking of Bea. Anna—Anna always there at his side, helping, understanding.

"Anna," he said. He had never liked the name. "Ansie." There had been a little girl, a very long time ago, when he was a child, and her name had been Ansie.

He released her other hand and cupped her upturned face in both of his. His head bent to hers, slowly and tenderly. There was no

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fierceness here, only the hint of growing passion.

When he lifted his lips from hers, he laughed and said quietly: "It saves words, doesn't it?"

"Yes." Her voice was small and husky. "Yes, it does . . . dear."

If his mind was "open," he might feel what she did. Cautiously and warily, he reached out to her, with his arms and with his mind. He needed no questions and no answers now.

"Ansie!" he whispered again, and lifted her slender body.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TAD'S left ear itched; he let it. "Operator on duty will not remove headphones under any circumstances until relieved—" There was a good hour before Gladys Porosky would show up to take over.

"Mars Machine Tool to Sun Lake," crackled the head-set suddenly. He glanced at the clock and tapped out the message time on the log sheet in the typewriter before him.

"Sun Lake to Mars Machine Tool, I read you, G. A.," he said importantly.

"Mars Machine Tool to Sun Lake, message. Brenner Pharmaceutical to Marsport. Via Mars Machine Tool, Sun Lake, Pittco Three. Request reserve two cubic meters cushioned cargo space outgoing rocket. Signed Brenner. Repeat, two cubic meters. Ack please, G. A."

Tad said: "Sun Lake to Mars Machine Tool," and read back painstakingly from the log: "Message. Brenner Pharmaceutical to Marsport. Via Mars Machine Tool Sun Lake, Pittco Three. Signed Brenner. Repeat, two cubic meters. Received okay. T. Campbell, Operator, End."

TAD'S fingers were flying over the typewriter keyboard. Mimi and Nick would want to know how the rocket was filling up. The trick was to delay your estimated requirements to the last possible minute and then reserve a little more than you thought you'd need. Reserve too early and you might be stuck with space you couldn't fill but had to pay for. Reserve too late and there might be no room for your stuff until the next rocket.

"Mars Machine Tool to Sun Lake, end," said the head-set. Tad started to raise Pittco's operator, the intermediate point between Sun Lake and Marsport, to boot the message on the last stage of its journey.

"Sun Lake to Pittco Three," he said into the mike. No answer. He went into "the buzz," droning: "Pittco Three, Pittco Three, Pittco Three, Sun Lake—"

"Pittco Three to Sun Lake, I read you," came at last, mushily, through the earphones. Tad was full of twelve-year-old scorn. Half

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a minute to ack, and then probably with a mouthful of sandwich! "Sun Lake to Pittco Three," he said. "Message. Brenner Pharmaceutical to Marsport via Mars Machine Tool, Sun Lake, Pittco Three. Request reserve two cubic meters cushioned cargo space outgoing rocket. Signed Brenner. Repeat, two cubic meters. Ack, please. G. A."

"Pittco to Sun Lake, message received. Charlie Dyer, Operator, out."

Tad fumed at the Pittco man's sloppiness and make-it-up-as-you-go procedure. Be a fine thing if everybody did that—messages would be garbled, short stopped, rocket-loading fouled up, people and cargoes miss their planes.

He tapped out on the log sheet: "Pittco Operator C. Dyer failed to follow procedure, omitted confirming repeat. T. Campbell." He omitted Dyer's irksome use of "out" instead of "end" and the other irregularities, citing only the legally important error. That was just self-protection; if there were any errors in the final message, the weak spot on the relay could be identified. But Tad was uncomfortably certain that Dyer, if the report ever got back to him, would consider him an interfering brat.

He bet Mr. Graham's last message had got respectful handling from Pittco, in spite of the pain-in-the-neck Phillips Newscode it had been couched in. They all wanted Graham. Tad had received half a dozen messages for the writer extending the hospitality of this industrial colony or that. The man had good sense to stick with Sun Lake, the boy thought approvingly. There was this jam with the rocket and the commissioner, but the Sun Lakers were unquestionably the best bunch of people on Mars.

"Pittco to Sun Lake," said Dyer's voice in the earphones.

"Sun Lake to Pittco, I read you, G. A.," snapped Tad.

"Pittco Three to Pittco One, message. Via Sun Lake, Mars Machine Tool, Brenner Pharmaceutical, Distillery Mars, Rolling Mills. Your outgoing rocket cargo space requirements estimate needed here thirty-six hours. Reminder downhold cushioned space requests minimum account new tariff schedule. Signed, Hackenburg for Reynolds. Repeat, thirty-six hours, ack please, G. A."

HUH! Dyer repeated numbers on *his* stuff, all right! Tad acked and booted the message on. The machine shop in the "canal" confluence would get it, then the drug factory in the highlands dotted with marcaine weed, then the distillery among its tended fields of wiregrass, then the open hearth furnaces and rolling mills in the red taconite range, and at last Pittco One, in the heart of the silver and copper country.

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He hoped he wouldn't have to handle any of Graham's long code jobs. Orders were to cooperate fully with the writer, but even Harve Stillman, who'd taken Graham's story on his rocket trip and Marsport, had run into trouble with it. Tad loafed through the material to the coded piece by Graham and shuddered.

IT was okay, the boy supposed, for on Earth, where you didn't want somebody tapping a PTM transmission beam and getting your news story, but why did the guy have to show off on Mars where the only way out was by rocket and you couldn't get scooped?

"Marsport 18 to Pittco Three," he heard faintly in the earphones. Automatically he ran his finger down the posted list of planes. Marsport 18 was a four-engine freighter belonging to the Marsport Hauling Company.

"Pittco Three to Marsport 18, I read you, G. A."

"Marsport 18 to Pittco, our estimated time of arrival is thirteen-fifty. Thirteen-fifty. We're bringing in your mail. End."

"Pittco to Marsport 18, O. K., E.T.A. is thirteen-fifty and I'll tell Mr. Hackenburg. End."

Mail, thought Tad enviously. All Sun Lake ever got was microfilmed reports from the New York office and business letters from customers. Aunt Minnie and Cousin Adelbert's wouldn't write to you unless you wrote to them; and Sun Lake couldn't lay out cash for space-mail stamps.

Tad's ear itched. One thing he missed, he admitted to himself in a burst of candor, and he'd probably have to go on missing it. The Sun Lake Society of New York couldn't spontaneously mail him the latest *Captain Crusher Comix*.

He had read to tatters Volume CCXVII, Number 27, smuggled under his sweater from Earth. And to this day he hadn't figured out how the captain had escaped from the horrible jam he'd been in on Page 64. There had been a Venusian Crawlbush on his right, a Martian Brownie on his left, a Rigelian Paramonster drifting down from above and a Plutonian Bloodmole burrowing up from below. Well, the writers of Captain Crusher knew their business, thought Tad, though they certainly didn't know much about Mars—the *real* Mars. Their hero never seemed to need OxEn or clothing any warmer than hose and cape when on a Martian adventure. And he was always stumbling over Brownies and dead cities and lost civilizations.

Bunk, of course. Brownies, dead cities and lost civilizations would make Mars a more interesting place for a kid. But when a person grows up, other things mattered more than excitement. Things like doing a good job and knowing it. Things like learning. Getting along. Probably, Tad thought un-

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comfortably, getting married some day.

"Mars Machine Tool to Sun Lake. Sun Lake, Sun Lake, Sun Lake, Mars Machine Tool, Sun Lake—"

"Sun Lake to Mars Machine Tool, I read you, G. A.," Tad snapped, peeved.

The operator might have waited just a second before he went into the buzz.

"Mars Machine Tool to Sun Lake, message. Pittco One to Pittco Three. Via Rolling Mill, Distillery Mars, Brenner Pharmaceutical, Mars Machine Tool, Sun Lake, outgoing rocket cargo space requirements are: ballast, thirty-two cubic meters; braced antishift, twelve point seventy-five cubic meters; glass-lined tank, fifteen cubic meters; cushioned, one point five cubic meters. Regret advise will require steerage space one passenger. F.Y.I., millwright's helper Chuck Kelly disabled by marcaine addiction."

The repeats followed and Tad briskly receipted. He raised Pittco Three and booted the message, grinning at a muffled "God damn it!" over the earphones as he droned out the bad news about Kelly. Steerage passenger space didn't come as high as cushioned cargo cubage; a steerage passenger was expected to grab a stanchion, hang on and take his lumps during a rough landing; but it was high enough.

SUN LAKE couldn't afford cushioned cubage, ever, and settled for braced antishift. Sometimes crates gave and split under the smashing accelerations, but the cash you had to lay out for cargo protected springs, hydraulic systems and meticulous stowage by the supercargo himself wasn't there. It meant a disgruntled customer every once in a while, but the tariffs made you play it that way.

The door behind him opened and closed. "Gladys?" he asked. "You're early."

"It's me, sonny," said a man's voice—Graham's. "You mind filing a little copy for me?"

The newsman handed him a couple of onionskin pages. "Phillips Newscode," he said. "Think you can handle it?"

"I guess so," said Tad unhappily. "We're supposed to cooperate with you." Blankly he looked at the sheets and asked: "Why bother to code it, though?"

"It saves space, for one thing. You get about five words for one. 'GREENBAY,' for instance, means 'An excited crowd gathered at the scene.' 'THREEPLY' means 'In spite of his, or their, opposition.' And, for another thing, what's the point of my knowing the code if I never use it?" He grinned to show he was kidding.

Tad ignored the grin and remarked: "I thought that was it."

He entered the time in the log

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and said into the mike: "Sun Lake to Pittco Three." Pittco acked.

"Sun Lake to Pittco Three, long Phillips Newscode message, Sun Lake to Marsport. Via Pittco Three. Message: Microfilm following text and hold for arrival Douglas Graham Marsport and pickup at Administration Building. GREENBAY PROGRAHAM SUNLAKE STOP POSTTWO ARGUABLE FUZZERS MARSEST BRIGHTEST STOP ARGUABLEST MARSING MYFACED GINFLOOZERS DOPEBORT FELKIL PARA UNME SUNLAKE HOCFOCUS COPLOCKED ETERS EARTHED STOP SAPQUISFACT HOCPLAGUER ERQUICK—"

GRAHAM heard the last of the story go out and saw the kid note down the acknowledgment in the log.

"Good job," the gunther said. "Thanks, fella."

Outside, the chilly night air fanned his face. It had been a dirty little trick to play on the boy. They'd give him hell when they found out, but the message had to clear and that Stillman knew a little Phillips—enough to wonder and ask questions.

Graham took a swig from his pocket flask and started down the street. He'd needed the drink, and he needed a long walk. It was surgery, he told himself, but surgery wasn't always pleasant for the surgeon. That doctor might be able to understand if he could only step back and see the thing in perspective. As it was, Tony obviously believed Mrs. Kandro's absurd story about somebody doping the beans.

The writer grinned sardonically. What a cesspool Mars must be if even these so-called idealists were so corrupted! Marcaine addiction by a brand-new mother, theft of a huge quantity of marcaine clearly traced to the Colony. The doctor would hate him and think him two-faced, which he was. It was part of the job. He was going to start an avalanche; a lot of people would hate him for it.

An impeccable, professional hatchet job on Sun Lake was the lever that would topple the boulder to start the avalanche. Senators would posture and declaim, bills would be written and rewritten by legislative clerks, but that would be just the dust over the rumbling rocks.

The public relations boys of the industrials used to be newspapermen themselves, and they could pick their way through Phillips. The word would be passed like lightning. They'd learn, to their horror, that it wasn't going to be a cheerful travelog quickie like his last two or three; that Graham was out for blood. The coded dispatch would be talked over and worried over in most of Mars' administration buildings tonight. They would debate whether he was going to

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put the blast on all the colonies. But they'd note that he pinned all the guilt so far on Sun Lake, not mentioning specifically that the abortion and the prostitution had occurred at Pittco.

So, by tomorrow morning, he'd let one of the industrials send a plane for him. He'd been playing hard to get for two days—long enough. He'd put on his jovial mask and they'd fall all over themselves dishing the dirt on each other. He'd make it a point to pass through Brenner Pharmaceutical. Quasi-legal operators like Brenner always knew who was cutting corners. And Bell—what tills did he have his hand in?

Graham knew there wasn't another newsman alive who could swing it—the first real story to come out of Mars besides press handouts from the industrials. And the planet was rotten-ripe for it.

But, mostly, he would just scare them, be the scoffing, good-humored know-it-all, so cheerfully sinister that they'd try to buy him off with dirt about the other outfits. He'd make no open promises, no open threats, and it all would drop into his lap the way it always had.

No, not always, he grimly corrected himself. Once he'd been a green kid reporter, lucky enough to break the Bell scandal. He'd actually been sorry for the crook. There'd been a lot of changes since. It was funny what happened to you when you got into the upper brackets.

FIRST you grabbed and grabbed. Women, a penthouse with a two-acre living room, silk shirts "built" for you instead of the nylon all the paycheck stiffs wore, "beefsteaks" broiled over bootleg charcoal made of real wood from one of Earth's few thousand acres of remaining trees.

You grabbed and grabbed, and then you got sick of grabbing. You felt empty and blank and worked like hell to make yourself think you were happy. And then, if you were lucky, you found out who you were.

Graham had found out that he—the youngest one, underfed, the one the big boys ganged up on for snitching, the one the cop called a yellow little liar, the one nobody liked, the one who always got his head knucked when they played Nigger Inna Graveyard—yes, he had power. It was the monstrous energy of Earth's swarming billions. If you could reach them, you could have them. You could slash down what was rotten and corrupt; a thieving banker, a bribed commissioner, a Mars colony.

Under the jovial mask it hurt when they called you a sensationalist, said you were unanalytical, had no philosophy, couldn't do anything but set down facts to titillate the uncritical audience. But what you could do and they couldn't was stir

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the billions of Earth, make them laugh, make them hopeful, make them rage—and when they raged, focus their rage to a white-hot spot that cauterized a particular bit of rottenness.

Graham stumbled and took a swig from his flask.

Who had to have a philosophy? What was wrong with exposing crackpots and crooks? The first real news story out of Mars would break up the Sun Lake Colony. Some good would go with the bad; the surgeon had no choice. That Kandro woman and her baby! The child belonged on Earth. And it would go there. The little thing would never know if not for Graham that there was anything but Mars. *I'm supposed to be hard-boiled,* he thought, a little drunk and sentimental, *but I know what's right for that kid.*

"Hey!" he said. Where the hell was he, anyway? Wandering in the desert, high as a kite on his expected triumph. His feet had led him down the Colony street, along the path to the airfield, past it and a few kilometers toward the Rimrock Hills. He blamed it on the Mars gravity. Your legs didn't tire here, for one thing. The radio shack light was plain behind him; dimmer and off to the left of it shone the windows of the Lab, merged in one beacon.

The radio shack light went out and then on again. A moment later, so did the light from the Lab.

"Power interruption," he said. "Or I blinked."

It happened again, first the radio shack and then the Lab. And then it happened once more.

The writer took out his flask and gulped. "Who's out there?" he yelled. "I'm Graham!"

There wasn't any answer, but something came whistling out of the darkness at him, striking his parka and falling to the ground. He fumbled for it while still trying to peer through the night for whatever had passed between him and the lights of Sun Lake.

"What do you want?" he yelled into the darkness hysterically. "I'm Graham! The writer! Who are you?"

Something whizzed at him and hit his shoulder.

"Cut that out!" he shrieked, and began to run for the lights of Sun Lake. He had taken only a few steps when something caught at his leg and he floundered onto the ground. The next and last thing he felt was a paralyzing blow on the back of his head.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

TONY woke up in time for breakfast, an achievement in itself. He'd had, at best, some hundred and fifty minutes of sleep after a long and hard day, and that interrupted by emergency, crisis, and triumph.

He washed without noticing the

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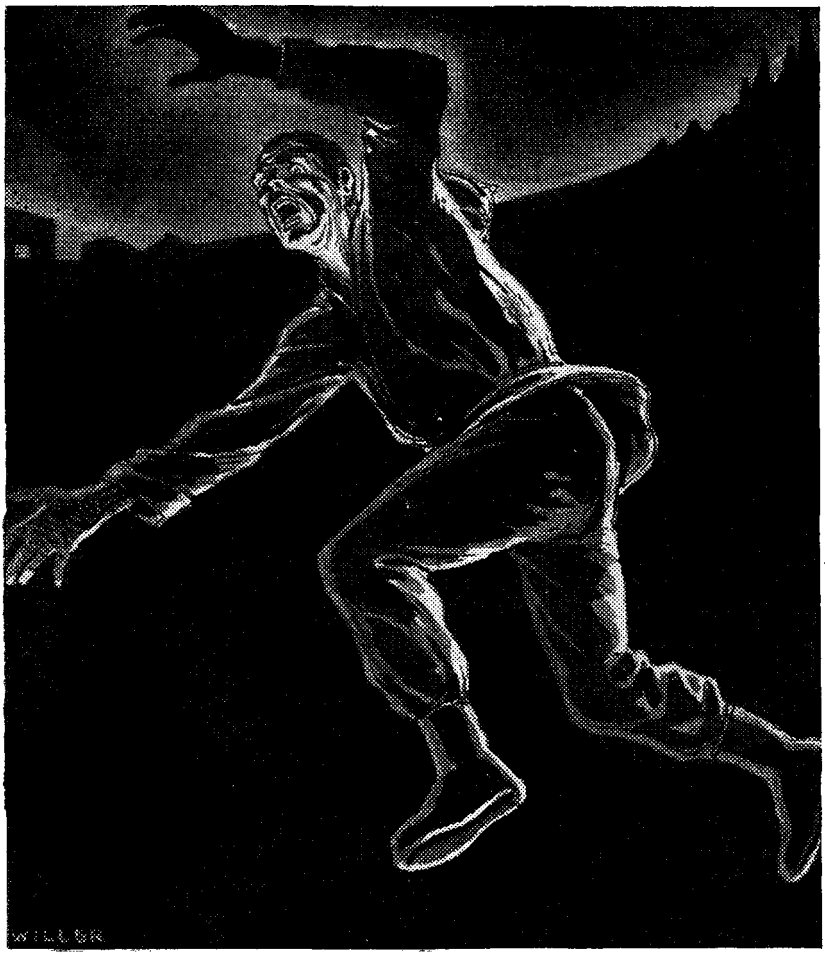

stench of the alcohol. He noted the time; good thing there was no Lab inspection to do this morning. He noticed the closed bedroom door; good thing he'd so hospitably given up his own bed to Graham, considering the unexpected turn of events the night before. He threw his parka over his shoulders and stepped out into the wan sunlight, oblivious to the lingering chill; good thing he—

Good thing he could still laugh at himself, he decided. What was

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the old saw about all the world loving a lover? Nothing to it—it was the lover who loved the whole world. *Love, lover, loving,* he rolled the words around in his mind, trying to tell himself that nothing had really changed. All the old problems were still there, and a new one, really, taken on.

But that wasn't so. Graham had spent half the night writing his promised story. Sunny Kandro was all right at last. And Anna—Ansie—a problem? He could remember thinking, in the distant past, as long as two days ago, that such an involvment would present problems, but he couldn't for the life of him remember what they were supposed to have been.

HE went in to breakfast, not trying to conceal his exuberance, and sat down between Harve Stillman and Joe Gracey.

"What's got into you?" Harve asked.

"Something *good* happen?" Gracey demanded.

Tony nodded. "The Kandro baby," he explained, using the first thing that popped into his head. "Jim woke me up last night. Polly was—was having trouble with the baby," he hastily amended the story.

He'd have to tell Gracey about the marcaine. There *was* a problem after all, but this wasn't the place for it; a Council meeting after breakfast maybe.

"You know we've been having feeding trouble all along," he explained. "I found the trouble last night. I don't understand it, but it works. I took Sunny's mask off."

"You *what?*"

"Took his mask off; he doesn't need it. Eats fine without it, too. Trouble was, he couldn't breathe through his mouth and eat at the same time."

"Well, I'll be—How do you figure it?"

"Hey, there's a story for the gunther," Harve suggested. " 'Medical Miracle on Mars,' and all that stuff. Where is he anyhow?"

"Still sleeping, I guess. The bedroom door was closed."

"Did you talk to him last night?" Gracey asked.

Tony attacked his plate of fried beans, washed them down with a gulp of "coffee," and told the other man about Graham's promise. "He was up half the night writing, too. I heard him while I was examining the baby."

"Did he show it to you?"

"Not yet. He was asleep when I got back."

Harve pushed back his chair with a grunt of satisfaction. "I feel better already," he grinned. "First decent meal I've had in days. What's the program for today, Doc? You going to need me on radiological work?"

"I don't think so. I'll let you know if we do, after Joe and I get together with the others. Got time

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for a meeting after breakfast?" he asked the agronomist, and Gracey nodded.

"Okay, I'll be in the radio shack if you want me," Harve said. "The kids took over all day yesterday. Don't like to leave them too long on their own."

"Right. But I don't think we'll need you."

That marcaine business—how in all that was holy, the doctor wondered, did anybody get marcaine onto Polly's beans? After all the searching, in the middle of the hunt, who would do it? Why? And above all, *how?*

Maybe one of the others would have an angle on it.

ii

"ONE thing I'm glad about," Gracey said soberly. "We *did* make a thorough search. Whatever happens from here on out, at least we've proved to our own satisfaction that nobody in Sun Lake stole the stuff."

"That's nice to know," Mimi agreed with considerably less feeling. "But frankly, I'd almost feel better if we *had* found it. I'd gladly turn the bum who took it over to Bell's tender mercies, if it was one of us. This way, we have to depend on Graham. You're *sure* he's with us?" She looked questioningly from the doctor to the electronics man.

"How sure can you get?" Nick shrugged. "He said so. Now we wait to see his story, that's all."

"I don't think we have to worry about that," Tony said briefly. He couldn't tell them any more. He was sure himself, but how could he explain without giving away Anna's secret? "Look," he went on briskly, "there's something else we *do* have to think about. I told you about Sunny Kandro, Joe. There's more to it than what I said at breakfast."

Nick and Mimi both sat forward with new interest, as Tony repeated the news about the removal of Sunny's mask. He cut off their questions. "I didn't tell you how it started, though. Jim came to get me, not for the baby, but for Polly."

A sharp rap on the door stopped him. Harve Stillman walked in. His face was grim; he carried a familiar sheaf of onionskin pages in his hands.

"What's the matter, Harve?" Mimi demanded. "Aren't you supposed to be on shift in the radio shack?"

"That's right. I walked out."

"No relief?" she snapped. "Are you sick?"

"I'm sick, all right. And it doesn't make any difference now whether radio's manned or not." He slapped the onionskin onto the table, and threw down on top of it two sheets of closely written radio log paper. "There you are, folks, have a look. It's all down in black

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and white. That's the translation on the log sheets. The bastard filed it in Phillips, so Tad wouldn't know what he was sending. When I think what a sucker I was, letting him pump me about who knew newscode around here! Go on, read it!"

Mimi picked up the sheets and glanced at the penciled text. Her face went white. She reached for the onionskin, glanced at it, and returned her eyes to the log sheets. In a minute she looked up again.

"Harve, there couldn't be any mistake?"

"I know the code," he said, bluntly.

"Hey," Nick protested, "could you maybe let us in on it?"

"CERTAINLY," she smiled bitterly. "This is the story written for us by D. Graham, your friend and mine. 'I was greeted by a frightened crowd on my arrival at Sun Lake, and no wonder. After two days in this community, I am able to reply to the heads-in-the-clouds idealists who claim that on Mars lies the hope of the human race. My reply is that on Mars I immediately came face-to-face into drunkenness, prostitution, narcotics, criminal abortion, and murder. It is not for me to say whether this means that Sun Lake Colony, an apparent center of these activities, should be shut down by law and its inmates deported to Earth. But I do know—' "

"That's crazy!" Nick broke in. "I heard him say myself—" He stood up angrily.

Tony reached out a hand to restrain him. "He didn't promise a damn thing, Nick. We just heard it that way. He said he'd do a story, that's all."

"That's enough for me," Cantrella replied. "He promised, and he's by God going to keep his promise."

"Sit *down*, Nick," Mimi interrupted. "Beating Graham up isn't going to solve anything. Harve, you get back on duty, and buzz one of the kids to go over to Tony's and collect Graham. If he's asleep, tell them to wake him up. We'll go through the rest of this while we're waiting." She eyed the sheets of paper distastefully.

Harve slammed the door behind him, and Mimi turned to the others. "I'm sorry. I should have checked with you first. Every time something goes wrong, I start giving orders as if I owned the place. Here." She handed the sheets to Joe Gracey, still sitting quietly to her left. "You look calm. You read it."

Joe took the papers and went on where she had stopped before.

"He can't do that!" Nick protested furiously, when Joe finished. "That story is full of lies! The murder wasn't here. Neither was most of the other stuff. How can he—"

"He *did*," Tony pointed out.

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"How much convincing do you need?"

"It's carefully worded," Gracey said. "Most of it isn't lies at all, just evasions and implications."

"We've got to assume he's smart enough to write a libel-proof story." Mimi had recovered her briskness. "There's one place I think he slipped, though. Can I see those sheets of Graham's again, Joe?"

HER eyes were shining when she looked up again. "We've got him!" she said. "I'm sure of it! Let's call in O'Donnell and get his opinion on it. This stuff about Polly." She read aloud: "'. . . the young mother of a newborn baby, unable to feed her infant because of her hopeless addiction to marcaine. This reporter was present at a midnight emergency when the Colony's doctor was called to save the child from the ministrations of its hysterical mother . . .' Tony, you can testify to that!"

"I don't know," said the doctor, painfully. "Sure, I realize Polly's not an addict, but—that's what I was starting to tell you when Harve came in. That's what Jim got me up for last night. Polly was sick, and there's no doubt that it was a dose of marcaine that was responsible."

"What?"

"Polly?"

"But she couldn't be the one. She was—"

"How did Graham find out about it?"

Tony waited till the questions stopped, then gave them the whole story, from the time Jim Kandro roared into his house at one o'clock in the morning, right through the removal of the mask.

"We were both asleep when Kandro came in," he explained, "and the noise woke Graham too. I didn't see him again myself, but I heard him typing when I was in the hospital with the baby. And Ans—Anna told me she talked to him while she was making the bottles. She had no reason to hold back any information. I told her myself that he was writing a friendly story."

"Well, that fixes us, but good. Where did Polly get the stuff?" Nick demanded. "We've hunted every inch of this place looking for marcaine; how come it didn't show up?"

"I've been trying to figure that myself," Tony said. "I don't think *she* got it. Her reactions were not those of a marcaine user, and I'd swear she was as shocked as she said she was when I diagnosed it. The stuff was put there—and don't ask me who, or why, because I can't even begin to guess."

"Well, we've got our hands full," Mimi said thoughtfully. "Where do we start? It seems to me the same answer is going to settle two of our problems. Where did Polly's marcaine come from,

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and how are we ever going to get out of this impossible situation with Bell?"

"That's not all," Nick added grimly. "We can solve both of those, and still get booted off Mars when this story breaks."

"That's a separate matter. All I can do about that is try and talk to Graham—or prove to him that at least part of the story is libelous. Come in," Mimi called, in answer to a knock outside.

Gladys Porosky pushed the door open and announced breathlessly: "We can't find him. We looked all over and he's not any place."

"Graham?" Tony jumped to his feet. "He was asleep in my bedroom; I left him there. He has to be around."

GLADYS shook her head. "We opened the door when he didn't answer, and he wasn't there. Then we scattered; all the kids have been looking. He's not at the Lab, or in the fields, and he's not in any of the houses. Nobody's seen him all morning."

"Thanks, Gladys," Mimi cut her short. "Will you try to find Jack O'Donnell for me? Ask him to come over here."

"Okay." She slammed out of the door, leaving a whirlwind of babble and excitement behind her.

"I suppose he's skipped," Tony said. "Probably messaged one of the industrial outfits in that damn code of his, and got picked up during the night. His bags are still at my place, though—I saw them this morning. That's funny."

"Very funny," Nick echoed glumly. "Ha, ha."

"What's luggage to a guy who can write like that?" Gracey asked. "He can get all the luggage he wants just by wiping out another plague spot like us."

O'Donnell came in, and they waited in tense silence while the ex-lawyer read through Harve's penciled translation. "Only possible libelous matter I see is about the marcaine-addict mother. What's all that?"

They told him, and he shook his head. "No more chance in a court of law than a snowball in hell," he said flatly.

"But I don't care *how* he worded it. The story's not true."

"How many stories are? If truth or justice made any difference in the Earth courts, I wouldn't be here. I loved the law. The way it looked in the books, that is. I guess I'll have to pass my bar examinations all over again. Mars is under the Pan State, but I suppose this constitutes interrupted residence anyway."

"Big fat chance you'll have of getting to take your bar exams after that smear," said Gracey. "I'm not kidding myself about getting to teach college again. If I can get some money together, I'm going to try commercial seaweeds."

"God help Sargasso Limited,"

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said Nick Cantrella. "And God help Consolidated Electronic when I start my shop again in Denver. It took them three months to run me into bankruptcy last trip around, but I'll get them up to four this time. They can't stand much of that kind of punishment."

"Let's not jump to conclusions," Mimi said, with the quiver back in her determinedly businesslike voice. "Let's assume Graham's skipped and the story's going through. We might still be able to hang on if we can square ourselves with Bell."

"Bell and Graham have no use for each other," Tony said. "Maybe this will make Bell easier to deal with."

"That I doubt. Let's figure on the worst. Suppose we *can't* convince Bell. We'll have two possible courses of action. We can sell out fast. From what I understand of this situation, I'm sure that the Commissioner would find a legal loophole for us on the marcaine deal if we decided to sell to, for instance, Brenner. If we do that, we can pay off what money we owe on Earth, book passage for our members, and, with luck, have a few dollars left over to divide between us." She smiled humorlessly. "You might even have a capital investment of five or ten dollars, Nick, to start working on Con-Electron."

"Good enough," he said. "It'll give me courage—if I can still find a bar with a five-buck beer, that is."

"That," Mimi went on, "would be the smart thing to do. But there's another way. We can hang on through the cordon, hoping to prove our point. It leaves us some hope, but it leaves us penniless, even if we manage to stick out the six months. Whatever cash or credit we have on hand we'll have to pay out for OxEn. Don't think Bell is going to let us have the stuff free. Meanwhile, our accounts payable keep coming due, and accumulating interest. There's a good chance that long before the six months are up we'll be forced into involuntary bankruptcy. That's how Pittco got Economy Metals last year."

"Like the cat got the canary," said Nick.

"Yes. We'd then be shipped back to Earth as distress cases, with a prior lien on our future earnings. If any."

MIMI sat down and Tony studied her handsome face as if he were seeing it for the first time. She'd been way up in the auditing department of a vast insurance company once. It would be hard on her. It would be hard on them all. But he wanted to yell and beat down doors when he thought of what it would mean to Anna, plunged back into the screaming hell of Earth's emotional "noise" that she couldn't block out.

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He tried to think like a schemer, and, knowing that it wouldn't work, told himself: *You marry Anna, take Brenner's offer—it's still open; good doctors aren't that easy to come by on Mars—and you set her up in a decent home.* But the whole thing crumbled under its own weight. She wouldn't marry a doctor whose doctoring was to patch up marcaine factory hands when they sniffed too much of the stuff.

"Eh?" he asked. Somebody was talking to him.

"Sell now, or hang on?" Mimi patiently repeated.

"I want to think about it," he told her.

The others felt the same way. It wasn't a thing you could make up your mind about in a few minutes, not after the years and years of always thinking one way: Colony survival. To have to decide now which way to kill the Colony . . .

The meeting broke up inconclusively. There was some recrating still to be done. The Lab had to be back to production, get this rocket's shipments ready just in case. And maybe by the time those chores were done, one of them would have some notion of how to start all over again, looking for the mysterious marcaine.

Tony headed out to the Lab, racking his brains for an answer. But halfway there, he found to his chagrin that he wasn't serious at all. He was striding along freely in the clean air and light gravity, to the rhythmic mental chant:

Ansie—Anna—Ann—Ansie—

CHAPTER TWENTY

JOAN RADCLIFF lay almost peacefully, drugging herself against the pain in her limbs and head by a familiar reverie of which she never tired. She saw Sun Lake Colony at some vague time in the future, a City of God, glowing against the transfigured Martian desert, spiring into the Martian air, with angelic beings vaguely recognizable in some way as the original colonists.

Her Hank, the bold explorer, with a bare-chested, archaic, sword-girt look; Doctor Tony, calm and wise and very old, soothing ills with miraculous lotions and calming troubled minds with dignified counsel; Mimi Jonathan, revered and able, disposing of this and that with sharp, just terseness; Anna Willendorf mothering hundreds serenely; brave Jim and Polly Kandro and their wonderful child, the hope of them all.

She wasn't there herself, but it was all right because she had done something wonderful for them. They all paused and lowered their voices when they thought of her. She, the sick and despised, had in the end surprised and awed them all by doing something wonderful for them, and they paid her memory homage.

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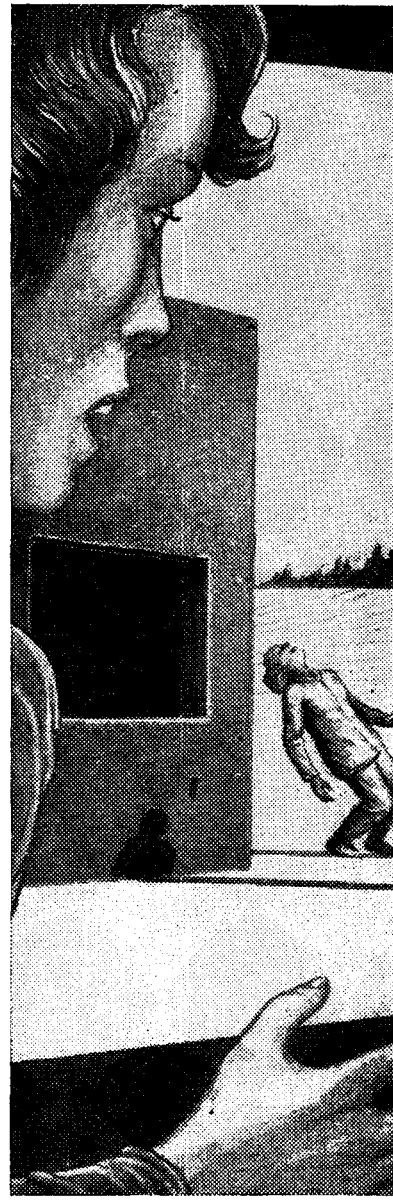
Nagging reality, never entirely silent, jeered at her that she was a useless husk draining the Colony's priceless food and water, giving nothing in return. She shifted on the bed.

Pains shot through her joints and her heart labored. *You're as good as they are,* whispered the tempter; *you're better than they are. How many of them could stand the pain and not murmur, never think of anything but the good of the Colony? But I'm not,* she raged back. *I'm not. I shouldn't have got sick; I can't work now; they have to nurse me. But you didn't drink any water until Tony made you,* said the tempter. *Wasn't that more than any of them would do? Won't they be sorry when you're dead and they find out how you suffered?*

She tried to fix her tormented mind on her Hank, but he had a sullen, accusing stare. She was tying him down; if they sent her back to Earth, he'd have to go too. They wouldn't let him stay in the Colony.

SHE wished Anna hadn't left, and swallowed the thought painfully. Anna's time belonged to the Colony and not to her. It was nasty of her to want Anna to stay with her so much. She straightened one puffy leg and felt a lance of pain shoot from toes to groin; she bared her clenched teeth but didn't let a whimper escape her.

That was very good, said the



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tempter. *None of them could do that.*

Anna had propped her up in bed before, so she could look out the window. Now she turned her head slowly and looked out.

I see through the window, she told herself. *I see across the Colony street to a corner of the Kandros' hut with a little of their streetside window showing. I see Polly Kandro cleaning the inside of the window, but she doesn't see me. Now she's coming out and cleaning the outside of the window. Now she turns and sees me and waves and I smile. Now she takes her cloth and goes around her hut to clean the back window and I can't see her any more.*

And now something glides down the Colony street with Sunny Kandro in its thin brown arms.

And now Polly runs around her hut again, her face white as chalk, tries faintly to call me, wave to me, and falls down out of sight.

Joan knew what she ought to do, and she tried. The intercom button had been put in so she had only to move her hand a few inches. She reached out for the button, and held her finger on it, but there was no answering click. It was a few seconds and maybe minutes, and the thing that had stolen Polly's baby was gone down the other end of the street.

The sick girl sat up agonizingly and thought: *I can do something now. They won't be able to say I was foolish, because if I wait any longer I won't be able to catch up; it will be too far away. There's nobody else to do it except Polly, and she fainted. It has to be done right away. I can't wait for them to answer and then come from the Lab.*

Joan stood up, stumped over to the canteen on the wall and tilted it for a long, long drink of cool water. It tasted good. She lurched out of the hut and stood for a moment, looking at the crumpled body of Polly.

Poor Polly, she thought as her heart thudded and faltered. *We must help one another.*

She shaded her eyes against the late morning sun and looked up and past the Colony street through the clear Mars air. There was a moving dot passing the airfield now, and she started after it, one step, two steps, three steps, as the City of God reformed in her mind and her eyes never left the moving dot.

EARTH would be gone, a dead thing swimming in the deeps of space, a grave example for children. See? You must not hate, you must not fear, you must always help or that will happen to us. You must be kind and like people; you mustn't make weapons because you never know where making weapons will end.

And the children would ask curiously what it was like, and their elders would tell them it was

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crowded and dirty, that nobody ever had enough to eat, that people poured poison into the air and pretended it didn't matter. That it wasn't like Sun Lake, their spacious, clean, sweet-smelling home, that there wouldn't have been any Sun Lake if not for the great pioneers like Joan Radcliff who suffered and died for them.

She wept convulsively at the pain in her limbs as she stumped across the desert rocks. They sliced her bare feet but she dared not look down ahead of her for fear of losing that swimming, moving dot she followed. *Magic,* she thought. *Fix a fairy with your eye and away it cannot fly.* Her heart—she could feel it thudding ponderously as a massive new pain burned through her left shoulder and arm.

I have done what I could, she thought. *Hank, you are free.* She fell forward and dragged her sprawled right arm along the ground so that it pointed to the moving dot and the Rimrock Hills beyond it.

ii

SOMEBODY grabbed him by the arm and motioned to his helmet. Tony stared a moment, uncomprehending, then switched on the helmet radio.

"What's up?"

"Joan—Joan Radcliff!" It was one of Mimi's young assistants in the Lab office. "She picked up the intercom and buzzed it. When I answered it, it went dead."

"I'll be right out." The doctor made it on the double, in spite of the hampering suit, out of the shipping room and into the shower. He would have given a year of his own life to be able to speed up the decontamination process this one time, but he'd been near the open crates. It wouldn't help Joan if he exposed himself, and her, too, to radiation disease.

He ran the distance from the Lab to the street of houses. He was still running when he approached the Kandros' hut, and almost missed seeing Polly's limp figure in the road. Thoroughly bewildered, he picked her up and looked around for help. There was no one in sight.

A moment's indecision, and then, quickly, he carried Polly toward the Radcliff hut and deposited her gently on the wall bunk in the living room. Pulse and respiration okay; she would keep. He headed for Joan's bedroom.

The doctor wasted a scant second staring at the empty bed; to him it seemed an endless time that had gone by. He pressed the intercom button, and waited through another eternity till the Lab answered.

Whatever had happened, whatever mysterious force had removed Joan from her bed and left Polly unconscious in the street, this, he realized, must have been the ulti-

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mate agony for Joan—to lie in this bed, in dreadful haste, to press this button and wait and wait until it was too late . . .

"That you, Doc? What's up?"

"Trouble. Get Jim Kandro out here. To the Radcliffs! And get Anna. Send her to Kandros'. There's no one with the baby. Is Mimi there? Put her on."

"Tony?" The Lab Administrator's crisp voice was reassuring; he could leave part of the problem, at least, in her competent hands.

"There's trouble here, Mim—don't know what, but Polly's fainted and Joan's disappeared."

"I'll be right there." She hung up. Tony retreated one step toward the living room, had an afterthought, and went back to the intercom.

"Get Cantrella here, too," he told the Lab office. "Tell him to bring along the e.e.g. setup. Fast."

Polly didn't look too bad. Marcaine again? He'd know soon.

What was going on?

Jim Kandro burst in, panting and terrified. His wide eyes went from his wife to the doctor, and a single miserable word came from him.

"Again?"

"I don't know. She fainted. Take her home, then look at Sunny. Anna's on her way over to help you."

Jim left with his burden in his arms, and Tony returned to the sick girl's bedroom. There was no trace, no clue, nothing he could find. He saw the wall canteen, upended, and went toward it with excitement. A puddle of water on the floor. Incredible carelessness for Sun Lake, but it meant something. Joan hadn't been carried away; she had gone herself. She had stopped for water and left the canteen this way.

A heartbroken shout from across the street sent him running out of the house, over to the Kandros'.

The living room was empty.

In the bedroom, Polly lay alone, still unconscious. He found Kandro in the new nursery, squatting on the floor beside the baby's empty crib, rocking in misery.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"THEY ought to get the test finished in a few minutes, but if you're ready, you might as well start now. It's a hundred to one chance against its being anything but cave dirt." Joe Gracey crumbled between skinny, sensitive fingers a bit of soil taken from the nursery floor.

"As soon as we get the transceiver," Mimi said. "Harve's bringing it over now."

Anna appeared in the doorway. "She's conscious now."

Tony went back into the bedroom. "Polly?"

Her eyelids fluttered open and closed. Her pulse was stronger, but she wasn't really ready to talk. He

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had to try. Without a stimulant, if possible.

"What happened, Polly?" he asked.

"What's the use?" she said feebly. "What's the use? We tried and tried on Earth, and I just got sick, and we had Sunny here, and now they've taken him. It isn't any good."

"Who's taken him, Polly?"

"I went out to clean the windows. I cleaned the front window and then I went around to clean the back window. When I looked in Sunny was gone. That's all. They took him. They just took him."

"*Who* took him, Polly?"

"I don't know. Brownies. We tried and tried on Earth—"

THE doctor took Anna to one side. "She's too lucid," he whispered. "Do you 'hear' anything?"

"Hardly anything." Anna shook her head. "She's numb. She's more conscious than she looks. Just numb. Doesn't care."

"Shock," Tony muttered. "There will be a reaction. She shouldn't be left alone."

"I'll stay," Anna offered.

"No, not you. We'll need you along with us."

"I'd rather not," she said.

"Ansie," he pleaded, biting back his angry disappointment.

"I shouldn't have told you," she said dully. "I should never have told anybody. All right, I'll go."

He smiled and gripped her arm. "Of course you will. You would have anyway."

"No," she said. "I wouldn't."

"Then maybe it's a good thing you told me." His voice was stern, but his hand pulled her closer to him.

Polly twisted on the bed and sobbed. Anna pulled away. "Maybe." She bit her lip, looked up at him. "Only *please* don't be angry at me. I can't stand it if you keep getting angry at me." She turned and fled.

Tony went back to the bed, erasing Anna and her problems from his mind with practiced determination. Polly was trembling uncontrollably. There was no more information to be had from her. He gave her a sedative and went out to join the others.

Harve had arrived with the transceiver in his hand. On Anna's suggestion, a rush call was sent out for Hank Radcliff to stay with Polly. He didn't know about Joan; they decided not to tell him about it.

"We need a man here with her," the doctor explained briefly. "The baby's disappeared, and we're going out now and try to track it. Polly might want to get up and follow. *You keep her in bed.*"

"Sure, Doc."

"Nick Cantrella will be over with some equipment. Tell him to test Polly."

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THEY left the house, Mimi and Anna and the doctor, Jim Kandro, Harve Stillman, and Joe Gracey.

"Look at that." Gracey was bending over in the road, pointing to the barely discernible mark of a bare toe. Here in the bottom of the old "canal" bed, where the settlement was built, the land retained a trace of moisture, enough to hold an impression for a while.

Only part of a toe, but it pointed a direction.

They headed up the street, past the huts toward the landing field.

"Hey, Joe!" Someone was pounding up the hill after them, shouting.

It was one of the men from the Agro Lab.

"That test—it's from the hills, all right, most likely from inside a cave, but hill dirt. That all you wanted?"

"Right. Thanks."

"They told me you wanted the word fast," the man said curiously. "Glad I caught you."

"Glad you did," Gracey agreed mildly. "Thanks again." He turned his back on the man. "Let's go."

They topped the slight rise that marked the farthest extent of the old river bed's former inundations, and faced a featureless expanse of level desert land, broken only by *Lazy Girl*, chocked on the landing field at their left, and the hills in the distance. No other human being was in sight. It was hopeless to look for footprints here, in the constantly shifting dust.

"The hills?" Mimi said.

Tony looked at Anna; she shrugged almost imperceptibly.

"Might as well," he agreed.

They moved forward, Kandro striding ahead with his great hands knotted into bony fists, his eyes set on the hills, unaware of the ground under his feet or of the people with him. It was Harve who found the print they had known was impossible—not really a footprint, but a spot of moisture, fast evaporating, still retaining a semblance of the shape of a human foot.

A little farther on there was another; they were going the right way. Tony stopped for a minute at one of the damp spots, poked a finger curiously into the ground. Grit and salt, as he had expected.

She couldn't have lived through it. He didn't know how she got as far as she did, but even if her heart held out, she must have sweated her life away to have left those damp indicators in the thirsty soil.

Only a little farther and the ground began to be littered with the refuse of the Rimrock Hills—here and there a sliver of stone, a drift of mineral salts. Gradually, the dust gave way to sharp rock and hard-packed saltpans. And the footprints of sweat gave way to footprints of blood.

Mimi drew in her breath between her teeth at the thought of the sick girl stumbling barefoot

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over the slicing, razor-edged stones.

"I see her," Kandro whispered, still striding ahead.

They raced a kilometer over the jagged rock and planed-off salt crust to the girl's body. She lay prone, with her right arm flung up

He glanced at Anna and straightened up quickly. "What is it?"

Her face was withdrawn and intense, her head held back like an animal scenting the wind. She scanned the broken waste, and pointed a hesitant finger. "Out

and pointing to the Rimrock Hills.

Tony peeled back her eyelid and reached for the pulse. He turned to his bag, and Anna—blessed Anna—was already getting out the hypodermic syringe.

"Adrenalin?"

He nodded. Swiftly and efficiently, she prepared the hypo and handed it to him. He bent over the girl busily, then sat back to wait.

there—it's *that* way—moving a little."

Kandro was on his way before she stopped speaking.

Stillman shaded his eyes and peered. "A rock in the heat haze," he pronounced finally. "Nothing alive."

Tony saw Anna shake her head in a small involuntary disagreement.

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THEY stood and waited in a tense small circle until Jim reached the spot. He looked down and they saw him hesitate, then move on with the same determined stride. Gracey lit out after him. Mimi murmured approval. There was no telling what Kandro might do in his present mood.

A barely audible noise from the ground, and Tony was on his knees beside Joan. Her eyes went wide open, shining with an inner glory that was unholy in the dirt-streaked, bloodstained dead white of her face. She smiled as a child might smile, with perfect inner composure; she was pleased with herself.

"Joan," the doctor said, "can you talk?"

"Yes, of course." But she couldn't. She only mouthed the words.

"Does it hurt any place?"

She shook her head, or started to, but when she had turned it to one side she lacked the strength to bring it back. "No." This time she forced a little air through to sound the word.

She was dying and he knew it. If it were only the heart, he might have been able to save her. But her body had been punished too much; it had given up. The water and the air that kept it alive were spent. Her body was a dead husk in which, for a moment, abetted by the little quantity of adrenalin, her heart and brain refused to die.

He had to decide. They needed what information she might have. She needed every bit of energy she had, to live out what minutes were left. The minutes didn't matter, he told himself.

He knew, even as he made up his mind, that this, like the ghost baby, would haunt him all his life. If he were wrong, if she had any chance to live, he was committing murder. But another life hung in the balance too.

"Listen to me, Joan." He put his mouth close to her face: "Just say yes or no. Did you see somebody take the Kandros' baby?"

"Yes." She smiled up at him beatifically.

"Do you know who it was?"

"Yes—no—I saw—"

"*Don't* try to talk. You saw the kidnaper clearly?"

"Yes."

"Then it was someone you don't know?"

"No—yes—"

"I'll ask it differently. Was it a stranger?"

"Yes." She looked doubtful.

"Anyone from the Colony?"

"No."

"A man?"

"No—maybe."

"A woman?"

"No."

"Someone from Pittco?"

She didn't answer. Her eyes were staring at her arm. The doctor had rolled her over, and the arm was at her side, stretched out. She let out a weird cry of fury and

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frustration. Tony watched and listened, puzzled, till Anna bent over.

"It's all right, Joan," she said softly. "You showed us. We saw the way it pointed. Jim is going that way now."

The girl's eyes relaxed, and once again the dreadful light of joy shone from them.

"Love me," she said distinctly. "I helped finally. Tony—"

He bent over. She was trailing off again, less breath with each word. She might have minutes left, or seconds.

"Nobody—believed—me or—them—it was—"

She stopped, gasping, and the quiet smile of content gave way to a twisted grin of amusement. "Brownie," she said, and said no more.

ii

TONY closed her eyes and looked up to Anna's serene face. He saw that they were alone with the body of the dead girl.

"Where—?" He got to his feet, carefully dulling sensation, refusing to feel anything.

"Over there." She pointed to where two figures stooped over something on the ground. Farther off, Kandro's tall figure, still resolutely facing toward the hills, was being restrained by a smaller man —Joe Gracey? That meant it was Mimi and Harve close by.

"They found something?"

"Somebody," she corrected, and couldn't control a small shudder.

Tony started forward. "You better stay with Joan," he said with difficulty, hating to admit any weakness in her. "I'll call you if—if we need you for anything."

"Thank you." She was more honest about it than he could be.

They saw him coming twenty meters off.

"It's Graham," Mimi called.

"The lying bastard steals babies too!" Harve spat out in disgust.

"He looks bad," Mimi said quietly. "We didn't touch him. We were waiting for you."

"Good." The doctor bent down and felt along the torso for broken bones. Carefully, he rolled the writer over.

Graham's puffed eyes opened. Through broken lips with dried blood crusted on them he rasped jeeringly: "Come back to finish the job? God damned cowards. Sneak up on a man. God damned cowards!"

"None of our people did this to you," Tony said steadily. His hands ran over the writer's battered head and neck. The left clavicle was fractured, his nose was broken, his left eardrum had been ruptured by blows.

"Let's get him back to the hospital," he said. "Harve, tell the radio shack to raise Marsport. Get Bell. Tell him we need that Bloodhound. Tell him I will not take no for an answer."

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IN AWKWARD silence the little procession walked along the Colony street, Kandro and Stillman together, carrying the writer, and Tony bearing the dead girl in his arms. The news had gotten around. Lab work seemed once again to have stopped completely.

They escaped the heartsick stares of the colonists only when they entered Tony's hut-and-hospital. He deposited Joan there, on his own bed. It was still rumpled from Graham's brief occupancy the night before. They settled the writer on the hospital table. With Anna's help, he removed the torn and bloody clothing from Graham's body.

"If you don't need us for anything, Tony, I think we better get going," Mimi said. "We ought to stop in and see Polly."

"Sure. Go ahead—oh, wait a minute." Jim Kandro turned from his fixed spot in the doorway to listen.

Tony beckoned to the blackhaired Lab administrator to the other side of the room.

"Mimi," he said in an undertone, "you ought to know that Polly has a gun. I'm not sure whether Jim knows it or not. You might want it if you're going out again. Anyhow, somebody ought to get it out of there."

She nodded. "Where is it?"

"Used to be in the baby's crib, but I think I talked her out of that. Don't know now."

"Okay, I'll find it. I think we better take it along. Oh—I'll send Hank back here."

He was thoughtful. "Anna." She looked up. Her face was set and miserable. "Are you going out with the search party?" he asked, an innocent question to the others who listened, with a world of agonizing significance for Anna.

"I—isn't Nick picking the people to go?"

"I thought you might *want* to go. If you're sticking around, you can handle Hank, can't you?"

"Oh, yes," she said eagerly. "I'd be much more useful that way, wouldn't I?"

He shrugged and tried to figure it out: she was perfectly willing to stay here in the hospital, to expose herself to Graham's physical pain and Hank's inevitable agony. But she was afraid to go out after the baby. Why?

Later, he decided, he could talk to her. He went briskly back to the table and began his examination of Graham. The writer was a mass of bruises from his chest up; he cursed feebly when the doctor felt for fractures. Tony set the collar bone and shot him full of sedation. "Your left eardrum is ruptured," he said coldly. "An operation can correct that on Earth."

"You bust 'em, somebody else fixes 'em," Graham muttered.

"Think what you want." He

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pushed the wheeled table over to the high bed Polly had occupied just a few days earlier.

Graham groaned involuntarily as Tony shifted his shoulder. The doctor eased up. *What for?* he stormed at himself. *Why should I be gentle with the dirty sneak?* He glanced hastily at Anna and caught the half-smile on her face as she pulled the covers over the writer.

"I'm going in the other room, Graham," Tony said. "You can call me if you need me."

"Sure," Graham told him. "I'll call you soon as I feel ready for another beating. I love it."

TONY didn't answer. In the other room, he sat down and faced Anna intently. "Do you know whether any of our people could have done that to him?"

"They aren't haters," she said slowly. "If they were, they wouldn't be here. Someone might fly into a rage and break his jaw, but methodical *punishment* like that—no."

"I'll tell you what it reminds me of. Big Ginny."

"She was killed."

"She was beaten up, though that wasn't what killed her."

"Does it have anything to do with Pittco?" Anna asked. "Why should they beat Graham? Why should they have beaten that woman?"

"I don't know." He managed a feeble grin. "You know that." He lowered his voice. "Can you 'hear' him?"

"He's in a lot of pain. Shock's worn off. And he hates us. God, he hates us. I'm glad he hasn't got a gun."

"He's got a by-line. That's just as good."

"Evidently that just occurred to him. Can he hear us in there? He's gloating now. It must be a fantasy about what he's going to do to us."

"Hell, we're through anyway. What difference does it make? All I want now is to find Sunny and get off this damned planet and give up trying. I'm sick of it."

"You're not even kidding yourself," she said gently. "How do you think you can fool me?"

"All *right*," he said. "So you think my heart is breaking because Sun Lake's washed up. What good is it going to do me? Anna, will I be seeing you back on Earth? I want us to stay teamed up. When I go into practice—"

The woman winced and stood up. She closed the door to the hospital. "He was listening," she said. "He let out a blast of derision that rattled my skull when he heard you talk about going into practice on Earth."

Tony pulled her down beside him, and held her quietly against his chest. "Ansie," he said once, softly, "my poor sweet Ansie." He kissed her hair, and they sat very still until Hank knocked on the door.

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ii

HANK stared at his wife's body, refusing to believe what he saw.

"She didn't feel much," Tony tried to explain. "Just a bad moment, maybe, when her heart gave out. She couldn't have felt anything, or she'd never have gotten so far."

"We were there at the end," Anna reminded the young man. "She was—she was very happy. She wanted to be useful more than anything else in the world. You know that, don't you? And in the end she was. She loved you very much, too. She didn't want you to be unhappy."

"What did she say?" Hank wouldn't tear his eyes from the bed. He stood and stared ceaselessly, as if another moment of looking would show him some fallacy, some error.

"Did she really say that, about loving me?"

"She said—" Anna hesitated, then went on firmly. "She said, 'Tell Hank I want him to be happy all the time.' I heard her," she answered Tony's look of surprise. It wasn't much of a lie.

"Thank you. I—" He sat on the bed beside his wife, his hand caressing the face stained with blood and dust.

Tony turned and left the room. In the hospital, Graham was asleep or unconscious again. Tony went back to his own chair in the living room.

There were so many hints, so many leads, so many parts of the picture. Somehow it all went together. He tried to concentrate, but his thoughts kept wandering, into the hospital where the writer lay beaten as Big Ginny had been beaten; into the bedroom, where Joan lay dead of—of Mars; where Anna was comforting the young man who would never realize, if he was lucky, that he had killed Joan himself as surely as if he had throttled her.

The last thing she said before she died! Tony snorted. The last thing she said, with that glorious light in her eyes, and a grin of delight on her face was "Brownie!"

And there it was!

Within a few seconds' time everything raced through his mind, all the clues, the things that fitted together—Big Ginny, and Graham's story, Sunny and the mask and Joan's dying words. Everything!

He jumped up in furious excitement.

No, not everything, he realized. Not the marcaine. That didn't fit.

He paced the length of the room, and turned to find Anna standing in the bedroom door.

"Did you call?" she asked. "What happened?"

He smiled. He went over and pushed the door closed behind her. "Ansie," he said, "you just don't

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know how lucky you are to have a big, strong, intelligent man like me. When are we going to get married?"

She shook her head.

"*Not* until you tell me what it's all about."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

REFUSE ENTERTAIN REQUEST THIS DATE. POLICE POWERS THIS OFFICE EXTEND ONLY TO INTERCOLONY MATTERS. PAC DOES NOT REPEAT NOT AUTHORIZE USE OF POLICE EQUIPMENT FOR INTRACOLONY AFFAIRS.

HAMILTON BELL
PLANETARY AFFAIRS
COMMISSIONER

TONY read through the formal message sheet, then the note attached to it:

"That's the master's voice up there. The PAC radio up in Marsport told me, on the side, that the old man doesn't believe a word of your story. If the baby really is missing, he figures 'that Markie Mama did it in.' Graham really fixed us. I hope you're taking good care of him. If you get him back in shape, I won't feel so bad about taking a crack at him myself. Harve."

The doctor smiled briefly, then asked Tad Campbell, who was waiting to take his answer back to the radio shack: "Did Mimi Jonathan see this?"

"No. It just came in. Harve wants to know what answer to send."

CANTRELLA and Gracey were out with the search party too, Tony realized. That left the decision squarely up to him.

He scribbled a note: "Harve, try this one on the commish. REQUEST USE PAC FACILITIES TO TRACK VICIOUS ATTACKER OF OUR GUEST, DOUGLAS GRAHAM. That ought to get us every tin soldier on the planet, and old man Bell himself heading the parade. Graham as victim gives him an out, too; he can call it intercolony. Get hot. We need that Bloodhound. Tony."

When the boy was gone, Tony paced nervously around the living room, started to heat water for "coffee," and decided he didn't want it.

There was an almost empty bottle of liquor on the floor near the table—Graham's. The doctor reached for it and drew back. It wasn't the right time or the right bottle.

He headed for the bedroom door, and remembered that Joan's body was still occupying the bed. He peered into the hospital; Graham was still sleeping. Nothing to do but sit and wait, and think it out all over again. It checked every time—but it couldn't be right.

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He hadn't told Anna yet. When you came right down to it, the whole thing was too far-fetched; he wouldn't believe it himself, if somebody else had proposed it.

But it checked all the way every time.

He got up again and hunted through his meager stack of onion-skin volumes and scientific journals. Nothing there, but Joe Gracey ought to know. When the search party came back . . .

Maybe they'd find the baby and the kidnaper; maybe he never would tell—or have to tell—anybody his crackpot theory. He decided to make the "coffee" after all, and wished he hadn't sent Anna and Hank back to stay with Polly, but Gladys had been frantic and frightened when she buzzed him. He couldn't expect the child to handle a hysterical woman by herself.

The doctor poured his "coffee" and drank it slowly, not letting himself go to the intercom. Polly and Hank could help each other now; it worked that way. And Anna was better for them than he would be himself. Somebody had to stay with Graham. He got up and paced restlessly into the hospital room again. The writer stirred and moaned as the door opened, but that was all.

It was more than an hour since Tad had left. Why no reply from Harve?

Tony went to the front door, opened it and peered up the street, out over the housetops to the landing field. Nothing in sight. He turned to go back in, and out of the corner of his eye saw them rounding the curve of the street.

Gracey, Mimi, Juarez, and then Kandro, taking each step reluctantly, his heart back in the hills, while Nick Cantrella and Sam Flexner, one on each side, urged him forward. Tony's heart sank; there was no mistaking defeat.

ii

"I'M sure," Mimi said steadily, "we heard him cry. Just for a minute. Then it was as if someone had clapped a hand over his mouth. Tony, we can't wait. We've got to get him out right away."

"What about the other caves?"

"We tried them all around," Gracey said. "Five or six on each side and a couple up above. But every one of those fissures narrows down inside the hill the same way. We couldn't get through. I don't see how the kidnapers did, either."

"How about the other side?" Tony asked. "Someone could go around with a half-track and take a look."

"We thought of it," Mimi said sharply. "Nick got Pittco on the transceiver. *Mister* Hackenburg was so sorry. *Mister* Reynolds was away, and he didn't have the authority himself to permit us to search on their ground. He was *so* sorry!"

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SHE stood up abruptly, and turned to the wall, not quite quickly enough. Tony saw her brush at her eyes before she turned back and said throatily: "Well, little men, what now? Where do we go from here?"

"We wait," Joe Gracey said helplessly. "We wait for Bell to answer us. We wait for Reynolds to get back. What else can we do?"

"Nothing, I guess. We left half a dozen men out there," Mimi told the doctor. "They're watching, and they have the transceiver. I guess Joe's right. We wait."

Silence, and Tony tried to find a way to say what he had to say. They couldn't just wait, not while he knew something to try. The baby might be all right, but maybe they would get there just one minute too late.

He turned to Gracey.

"Joe, what do you know about lethal genes?"

"Huh?" The agronomist looked up, dazed, shook his head, and repeated without surprise at the irrelevent question, "Lethal genes?" He stopped and considered, mentally tabulating his information. "Well, they're recessives that—"

"No, I know what they are," Tony stopped him. "I thought I heard you say something about them the other day. Didn't you say you thought you'd hit on some that were visible on Mars?"

Anna drifted in, with Hank at her heels, and they went straight through, into the room beyond where Joan still lay.

"Oh, yes," Gracey said. "Very interesting stuff. Come out to the Lab when you have the time, and I'll show you. We—"

Mimi jumped up. "*What* are you gabbling about?" she demanded. "This is an emergency! We have to find some way to rescue that baby!"

"I'm sorry, Mimi." Gracey was bewildered. "What's wrong anyway? Tony asked a perfectly innocent question, and I answered him when we'd all agreed that we had nothing to do but sit around and wait. Why not use the time?"

Abruptly, Tony made up his mind. It was up to him now. And to Anna. He got up and called her from the bedroom, led her outside, into the street in front of the house, where they were out of earshot of all the others.

"Well?" She smiled up at him. "Will you stop feeling sorry for me and tell me what you're sorry about?"

"In a minute. Anna, last night when we took the mask off Sunny —when you fainted—how did it feel?"

"I told you."

"Yes, you said it was very strong, stronger than you thought a baby could—feel. But was it just stronger or was there something *different?*"

"That's hard to say. I was—well, I was all worn out and upset.

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It might have been different, but I don't know how. I'm not even sure it was."

She looked up at him sharply. "Why?"

"It checks," he said to himself. "Listen, Ansie, there's a job to be done. A tough job. A job nobody can do but you. It may—hurt you. I don't know. I don't even know if it will work. It's a crazy theory I've got, so crazy I don't even want to explain it to you. But if I'm right, you're the only person who can do it." He stopped. "Anna, did you hear what Joan's last word really was? She said, 'Brownie.'"

He looked down into frightened dark eyes.

"Tony, there aren't any Brownies, are there?"

"You mean do I believe there are? No, I don't. But I do think there's *something*."

"You want me to go out there and listen?"

"Yes. But that's only part of it. I wouldn't let you go alone; if you do go, I'll be with you—if that helps any. But I want to go into the cave where they heard the baby and see what we can find."

"No!" The cry was torn from her. "I didn't mean that," she caught herself. "It's just—oh, Tony, I'm *afraid*."

"We've got to find out. Ansie, we've *got to find out*."

"The Bloodhound?" she asked desperately. "Can't you track them with the Bloodhound?"

"Bell hasn't answered us. How long can we wait?"

She stood silent for a moment, then turned her face up to his, serenely quiet now and trusting.

"All right," she said at last. "All right, Tony, if you say it has to be done."

"I'll be there with you," he promised.

iii

MIMI and Joe didn't understand, and Tony didn't try to explain. He simply repeated that he had an "idea;" he wanted to go out, with Anna, to the cave where the baby's cry had been heard.

He left careful instructions about the care of Graham if he should awake, and about Hank, Polly, and Jim, all three of whom were too upset to be left to themselves.

A ten minute ride on the half-track and they were within the shadow of the Rimrocks. The drifting stench of Pittco's refineries on the other side began to reach them; then the ground was too rocky to go on. Tony stopped the machine and they got out. Farther up the face of the nearest hill, they could make out the figures of the five who had remained on guard.

One of them came running—Flexner, the chemist. "They said on the transceiver you were coming," he told Anna and Tony. "What's your idea? We're going nuts sitting around waiting. Ted

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thought he heard Sunny cry again but nobody else did."

"I just wanted to see if I could turn up anything," Tony told him "We're going into the cave."

TOGETHER they walked out of the sunlight into the seven foot opening in the hard rock. One of the guards would have preceded them, but Anna firmly refused. A chalk mark along the wall, drawn by the others when they left the cave, was guide enough.

They followed the white line in and down some fifty meters, then fifty more along a narrowing left-hand branch, and then a hundred meters, left again and narrowing, to another fork. Both the branches were too small for an adult to squeeze through. The chalk line pointed into the right-hand cranny.

That was as far as they could go. They stood at the narrow opening, listening.

There was nothing to hear, no sound at all in the rock-walled stillness except their own breathing and the tiny rustling of their hands along rough alien stone.

They waited, Tony's eyes fixed on Anna's face. He tried to silence his thoughts as he could his voice, but doubts tore at him. He turned, finally, to the one certainty he knew, and concentrated on Anna and her alone: on his love for her, her love for him.

"I hear something," she whispered at last. "Fear—mostly fear, but eagerness, too. They are not afraid of us. I think they like us. They're afraid of—it's not clear—of people?"

She fell silent again, listening.

"People." She nodded her head emphatically. "They want to talk to us, Tony, but—I don't know." Her brow furrowed in concentration and she sat down suddenly on the hard rock floor, as though the physical exertion of standing were more than she could bear.

"Tony, go and tell the guards to go away," she said at last.

"No," he said firmly.

"Go ahead. Please. Hurry. They are trying—" Abruptly, she stopped concentrating on the distance. "You spoiled it," she said bitterly. "You frightened them."

"How?"

"You didn't trust them. You thought they'd hurt me."

"Ansie, how *can* we trust them? How can I leave you here alone and send the guards away? Don't you see I can't take that risk?"

"You made me come here," she said tiredly. "You said I was the one who could do the job. I'm trying to do it. Please go now and tell the guards to leave. Tell them to get out of range—down at the bottom of the hill, maybe as far away as the half-track. Please, Tony, do as I say."

"All right." But he was still hesitant. "Anna, who are they?"

"I—" The bitterness left her face. "Brownies," she said.

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"But that's not—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to feel angry and frustrated. What does the word mean?"

"They're *different*."

"Like Sunny?"

"Not exactly." She made a small useless gesture with her hands. "More—distinct. No, maybe you're right. I think they're like him, only older."

"How many are there?"

"Quite a few. Too many for me to count. One of them is doing all the—talking."

"Talking?" Yes, that was part of what had bothered him. "Ansie, how can you understand so clearly? You told me you can't do that. You didn't know what Graham was angry about. How do you know what they're afraid of?"

"Tony, I don't know. I *can* understand, that's all, and I'm sure it's right, and I know they're not tricking us. Now please, please go and tell the guards."

He went.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"KEEP him away from me!" Graham screamed.

Mimi raced through Tony's living room into the hospital half of the hut.

It was Hank, standing rigidly still, glaring at the writer. "You don't understand about Mars," Hank was saying in a hard monotone. "You never saw the Rimrocks when there was just enough light to tell them from the sky, or walked a hundred miles in the desert watching the colors change every minute."

"Mrs. Johnson, get him out of here. He's crazy."

Mimi took Hank by the arm. "I'm not crazy," he said. "Those boomers at Pittco, this writer here, Bell and his soldiers, Brenner and his factory, they're crazy. They're trying to cheapen Mars."

Hysteria, thought Mimi. She'd coped with enough cases of it when she'd bossed girls at desks, as far as the eye could see, on the 76th floor of the American Insurance Groups Building.

"Radcliff!" she said.

There was a savage whip-crack in her voice.

He turned to her, startled. "I wasn't going to hurt him," he said confusedly.

Get him to cry. Break him. Until then, there's no knowing what will happen. "Your poor wife's lying in there," she said with measured nastiness, "and you find time to brawl with a sick man."

"I didn't mean anything like that," he protested.

Still unbroken. "Get into the bedroom," she said. "Sit there. That's the least you can do."

He walked heavily into the room where his wife's body lay and she heard him drop into a plastic chair.

"Thanks, Mrs. Johnson," said Graham painfully. "He was spoiling for a fight."

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"Mrs. Jonathan," she corrected. "And I don't want your thanks."

She turned and rattled through drawers of medications, hoping she'd find something she could give Hank. She didn't know what to use or how much. She slapped the drawer shut and was angry with Tony and Anna for not being there when she needed them.

She stalked into the bedroom and stared at Hank without showing any pity. He was looking dully at the wall, a spot over the bed on which Joan's broken body lay. No shakes, no tears, unbroken still. But she couldn't bring herself to lash him further and precipitate the emotional crisis.

She went back into Tony's living room and threw herself into a chair. She'd hear if anything happened. Mrs. J., the terror of auditing, Old Eagle-eye, and a few less complimentary things when the girls were talking between the booths in one of the 76th-floor johns. Efficiency bonuses year after year, even bad years, and that meant you *were* an old witch. She must be out of practice, or getting soft, she decided harshly, if she couldn't handle an absurdly simple little thing like this.

We ought to have Tony train somebody besides Anna, she thought. *There's Harve, but he only knows radio-health.* And then she remembered that it didn't matter; Sun Lake wouldn't last that long.

SHE heard a plane coming in at the landing field and wondered whose. Hank stirred in the bedroom and she tensed, but then she heard the creak of his big body slumping back into the chair. He wouldn't break. He had too much of the old Marsman in him, the tough old breed. In the old days, if she'd been assigning a pair of girls to an audit program, she wouldn't have made a match like Hank and Joan—one starry-eyed and on fire for an ideal; the other solidly and physically in love with far places for their farness and mystery. But it had worked here and they'd had their measure of happiness before they had to taste their measure of hell.

Hank should have come earlier. He should have been one of the first, eating out of cans, mapping and mining, bearded to his waist, inarticulate, but sure about what he wanted. Joan should have come later. She should have been an immigrant after the colony had licked Mars medicine, while there still was grinding work and sacrifice enough to please the most impassioned, but not so much that a frail body would crumple under it.

But there wasn't going to be any "later," of course. It was hard to get used to that realization.

She got up and had a drink of water from the wall canteen, and then, defiantly, another, because it didn't matter now. She felt like taking on the world for Sun Lake.

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Joan must have felt like that. Their water supply was scanty, but it was water—not the polluted fluid of Earth, chlorinated to the last potable degree.

THE intercom in the bedroom buzzed. She walked in and picked it up, glanced at Hank, still numbly staring.

"Hello, Mimi." It was Harve. "Answer from Bell. Quote: 'RE ASSAULT ON DOUGLAS GRAHAM I AND DETAIL OF GUARDS WILL TAKE ACTION THIS MATTER. REQUEST USE PAC FACILITIES DENIED. HAMILTON BELL' et cetera. What do you figure he'll do—try and pin the Graham slugging on us too?"

"I don't know," she said. "It doesn't matter. What plane was that?"

"Brenner's. Snooty bastard didn't even check in with us. Just sat right down on the field.'

"He might as well. He'll own it soon enough."

She heard Harve clear his throat embarrassedly. "Well, I guess that's all."

"Goodby," she agreed, hanging up. She shouldn't have said that; she was supposed to pretend that while there was life there was hope.

"Hank?" she asked gently and inquiringly.

He looked up. "I'm all right, thanks."

He wasn't, but there was nothing she could do. She looked through the door to the hospital. Graham seemed to be dozing. She sat down in the living room again.

Brenner came in without knocking. "They told me you were here, Mrs. Jonathan. I wonder if we could go to your office in the Lab. I want to talk business."

"I'm staying here," she said shortly. "If you want to talk here, I'll listen."

Brenner shrugged and sat down. "Do we have privacy?"

"There's a boy in the next room going crazy with grief over his dead wife—and over the prospect of leaving Mars. And there's a badly beaten man sleeping in the hospital quarters."

The drug manufacturer lowered his voice. "Relative privacy," he said. "Mrs. Jonathan, you have the only business head in the Colony." He opened his briefcase on the table and edged the corner of a sheaf of bills from one of its pockets. The top one was a thousand dollars. He didn't look at it, but riffled the sheaf with his thumb, slowly, like a gambler manipulating a deck of cards. They were all thousands, and there were over one hundred of them.

"It's going to be very hard on some of the colonists, I'm afraid," he said conversationally.

"You have no idea."

"It needn't be that hard on all of them." His thumb flipped the big bills. "Your colony is facing

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an impossible situation, Mrs. Jonathan. Let's not mince words; it's a matter of bankruptcy and forced sale. I'm in a position to offer you a chance to retreat in good order, with some money in your pockets."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Brenner. I'm not sure I understand."

"Please," he smiled, "let's not be coy. I'm being perfectly candid with you. If it comes to a forced sale, I intend to bid as high as necessary; I need this property. But I'm not a man who believes in leaving things to chance. Why shouldn't you sell out to me now? It would save yourselves the humiliation of bankruptcy, and I believe everyone concerned would benefit financially."

"You realize I'm not in a position to close any deals, Mr. Brenner?" she asked.

"Yes, of course. You have a council in charge here, don't you? And you're a member. You could plead my case with them."

"I suppose I could."

"All right." He smiled again, and his thumb continued to riffle the pile of bills. "Then I have to plead it first with you. Why should you stay on Mars? In the hope that 'something' will turn up? Believe me, it will not. Your commercial standing will be gone. Nobody would dream of extending credit to the people who were six months behind on their deliveries. *Nothing will turn up,* Mrs. Jonathan."

"What if the stolen marcaine turns up?"

"Then, of course—" He smiled and shrugged.

MIMI read a momentary alarm in his face. For the first time since the crisis she entertained the thought that it was not a frameup.

She pressed harder. "What if we're just waiting to hand Bell the hundred kilos and the thief?"

Brenner turned inscrutable again. "Then something else will happen. And if the Colony survives that, something else again." He quickly denied the implication of sabotage by adding: "You have a fundamentally untenable financial situation here. Insufficient reserves, foggy motives—what businessman can trust you when he knows that your Lab production workers might walk out one fine day and stay out? They aren't bound by salaries but by idealism."

"It's kept us going."

"Until now. Come, Mrs. Jonathan, I said I wanted an advocate in the Council." He thumbed out the deck of bills all the way from the pocket in the opened briefcase. "You have a business head. You know that if you *do* produce my marcaine and the thief, Mr. Graham's little story—which I read with great interest—will be another bad hump to get over. There will be more."

He meant two things: more humps, and more sheafs of thou-

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sand dollar bills for her if she took the bribe.

Mimi smiled without moving a muscle of her face. It had been a long time since she had talked this kind of talk, but she still knew how. The smile stayed inside her head; her face displayed only the most casual interest.

"Are you offering to buy the Colony, Mr. Brenner? Would you care to name a price?"

"What are you asking?" he countered.

Oh, no, she thought, *you're not getting away with that.*

"All right, we'll play it your way," she said. "Name *two* prices. You want to buy my services, too, don't you?"

"Whatever gives you that notion? I'm not trying to bribe you, Mrs. Jonathan." He picked up the sheaf of bills and placed them in front of her. "There's a hundred thousand here. I can bring another —say another four hundred thousand—*for a down payment,* whenever you say. My price for the Colonly," he added distinctly, "is exactly five million."

"Plus your down payment?" she asked, amused.

"That's right."

"That would just about pay all our fares back to Earth. We'll smash the Lab to bits before we let you get it for any such price."

"You'll rot in prison if you do," Brenner said easily. "There is an injunction on file at Marsport signed by Commissioner Bell restraining you from any such foolishness. An act of contempt would mean imprisonment for all of you. I mean *all.*"

"No such paper has been served on us."

"The Commissioner assured me it had been served. I don't doubt his word. Not many people, including appeals judges, would doubt his word either."

MIMI didn't dare answer this display of force. She set her teeth and thought about five million—and five hundred thousand. Passage home, the respectability of having sold instead of going bankrupt, maybe the chance of another charter and another try—

"It'll have to be put into form by the Council and voted on by the entire Colony," she said painfully. "You wanted an advance. Take your money back; I'm not for sale. But I *will* plead your case if you'll make it ten million. God knows, it's a bargain. There's absolutely no depreciation on the Lab to be figured. It's better now than it ever was. Maintenance has always been top-level. Better than anything you'll ever be able to find in industry."

"Five million and five hundred thousand was my offer. I'm not the Crocsus uninformed people take me for. I have my expenses on the marcaine distribution end, you know."

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ii

TONY sweated out the time.

Eight minutes creeping along the chalk line in the dark—he'd left the light with Anna. Five minutes scrabbling over the boulders at the cave opening on the face of the hill. Twelve long minutes talking the guards into leaving, and a painful tortured eternity—maybe another twelve minutes reentering the cave and tracing the chalk line by the dim light borrowed from Ted.

Tony was sweating ice by the time the radiance from Anna's light came in view. He rounded the last curve in the winding passage, and something jumped up from the floor, straightened and stood, tense and watchful as the doctor.

Anna, seated on the cold floor, laughed softly, melodiously.

She was all right. Tony relaxed a little and instantly felt—something, a gentle stroking, a tentative touch, not on his head but *in* it. No menace, no danger. Friendship.

The doctor stared across the cavern: leathery brown skin, barrel chest, big ears, skinny arms and legs; the height of a small man or a large boy; and—a telepath.

The friendly touch on his mind persisted through his quick distaste, his exultation, his eagerness.

"Anna," very softly, "is it all right to talk?"

"Not too loud. His ears are sensitive."

"Who is he? Are there more? *Does he have Sunny?* Ask him that, Anna—ask him!"

"A Brownie," she laughed again, joyously. "You told me that. There are four more down there, inside, with Sunny."

"Is he all right?"

"Yes. They took him to help him, not to do any harm. He needed something, but I can't find out what."

The Brownie squatted again on the floor beside Anna. Tony approached slowly and sat down next to them.

He felt goose-flesh and memories of old nursery book horrors, but nothing happened. He forced himself to ask Anna: "What kind of thing?"

"Something to eat, I think. Something like the first sip of water when you're thirsty, and as necessary as salt, and—*good.* Maybe like a vitamin, but it tastes wonderful."

Tony ran through a mental catalogue of biochemicals. But that was foolish; how could you tell what would taste good to anything as alien as a Brownie?

"Have you tried sign language?" he asked Anna.

"Where do you start?" she shrugged. "You'd have to build up a whole set of symbols before you could get anything across . . . Tony, I'm sure we can get the baby back if we just understand what it is he needs."

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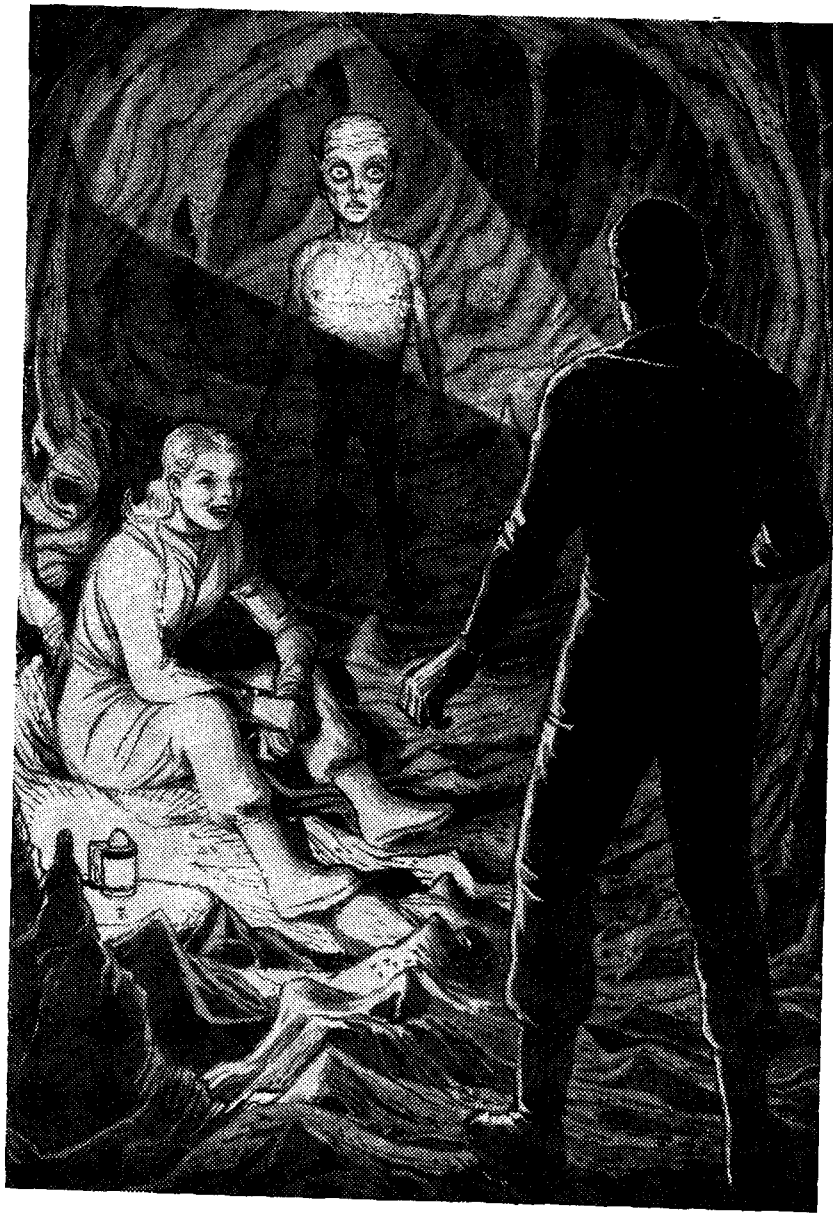

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THE doctor reached over, hesitated, and forced himself to tap the Brownie lightly on the shoulder. When he had the creature's attention, he whispered to Anna: "Tell him we're trying to find out what it is." He pointed to his own eyes. "Show us," he said to the creature, and tried to project the thought, the image of seeing, as hard as he could.

They kept repeating it with every possible combination of thought and act. Then, suddenly, the Brownie jumped and dashed off, down the tunnel.

"Did he get the idea?" demanded Tony. "Is he coming back?"

"It's all right," smiled Anna. "He understood."

Silence in the eerie place was almost unbearable.

"Don't worry so, Tony," Anna said. "If you want to know, he almost scared the wits out of me, too. I was sitting, trying to look down the little opening, and still—talking—to the ones down there, and he came up behind me. I was concentrating on them so I didn't hear him, either way."

Tony sat back thoughtfully. It was all true then; his crazy theory was right—there were actually Brownies on Mars, a form of life so highly developed that it was telepathic, and with no lower life-forms to have evolved from. He wondered if he had hit the right explanation, too, but there *was* no other explanation.

The brownie was back, carrying something, a box. Large letters in black on the side read:

DANGER
SEALED MARCAINE
CONTAINER
Do Not Open Without
Authorization
Brenner Pharmaceutical Co.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

TONY helped Anna dismount from the half-track, with her valuable burden in her arms. She jounced Sunny happily, and cooed down at the pink face. The doctor didn't jounce his own burden; he lifted it down even more carefully than he had helped Anna. The marcaine box was tightly wrapped in his shirt and hers. They were counting on the several layers of cloth to trap escaping dust and protect them from marcaine jags, but the doctor still wasn't taking any chances on stirring up the contents of the half-full box.

They cut across the bare land in back of the row of houses, heading toward the curved street near the Kandros'.

"Tony," Anna asked anxiously again, "*how* are we possibly going to explain it?"

"I told you I don't know." He was only a little irritable. They had the baby; they had the marcaine. "We'll have to talk to Mimi and Joe and Nick, and probably the

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others too. We'll see how it goes . . ."

"No, I don't *mean* that," she stopped him. "I mean to Polly. And Jim. Jim isn't going to like it unless he hears the whole story, and I don't know if we ought to . . ."

"Like it or not," Tony said briskly, "Kandro'll do what I tell him to. We'll have to tell them it's marcaine; I don't dare risk mislabeling the stuff. You'll have to blow some ampoules for it, I guess, and I'll figure out some way of wetting it down and getting it into them. But you're right," he added, "if you mean we shouldn't say any more than we have to just now."

They stepped onto the packed dirt of the street and cut across to the Kandros'.

Joe Gracey was sitting alone in the living room.

"Praise God," he said quietly, and called: *"Polly! Jim!"* The couple appeared, red-eyed, at the nursery door, saw their baby, and flew to him.

"You gave him to us again, Doc!" said Jim. "Thanks."

Polly was more practical: "Has he eaten? Is he well? He looks all right, but—"

"You can feed him in a minute. Now listen carefully. This young man of yours, you know, is special in some ways. He can take the Mars air and like it. It turns out that there's something else he needs —something that's good for him and bad for other people, just like the Mars air. It's marcaine."

Polly's face went white. Jim began a guffaw of unbelief that turned into a frown. He asked carefully: "How can that be, Doc? What *is* this all about? And who took him? We have a right to know."

Anna came to Tony's rescue. "You're not going to know right now," she said tartly. "If you think that's hard on you, it's just too bad. You've got your baby back; now leave the doctor alone until he's ready to tell you more."

Jim opened his mouth and shut it again. Polly asked only: "Doctor, are you sure?"

"I'm sure. And it *won't* have anything like the effect on Sunny that it had on you. But it's real marcaine, all right, and he's got to have it or die."

"Like OxEn?" asked Kandro. "It's only fair in a way . . ."

TONY ignored him. "I guess you're going to have to wean the baby after all, Polly," he said. "You can't keep taking marcaine for Sunny's sake. But for now, I guess you might as well nurse him. Your milk still has marcaine in it."

Kandro was still adjusting himself to the idea. "Sunny doesn't need OxEn, so he's got to take something else?"

"Yes," Tony said, "like OxEn . . ." He broke off, and Anna spun toward him, her eyes wide.

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The doctor forced his face into calm lines. "I want to have a talk with Joe now. And Nick Cantrella, Anna, will you see if you can get Nick on the intercom? Ask him to come over here right away. I've got an idea."

In the living room, he told Gracey: "You won't have to keep an eye on them any more, Joe. But watch *me*—I feel like Alexander, Napoleon, Eisenhower, and the Great Cham all rolled into one."

"You're certainly grinning like a lunatic," the agronomist agreed critically. "What's on your mind?"

"Wait a minute . . . did you get him?" Tony asked as Anna came in to the room.

"He's coming," she nodded. "Tony, what *is* it?"

"I'll tell you both, soon," he promised. "Let's wait for Nick, so I won't have to repeat it." He paced restlessly around the room, thinking it through again. It ought to work; it ought to!

WHEN Cantrella arrived, he turned on the two men. "Listen, both of you!" He tried not to sound too eager. "If I handed you a piece of living tissue with a percentage of oxygen enzyme—*and I don't mean traces*, I mean a *percentage*—where would we stand in respect to . . ." He halted up the cautious complicated phraseology. "Hell, what I mean is, could we manufacture OxEn?"

"The living virus?" Gracey asked. "Not crystalized OxEn processed for absorption?"

"The living virus."

"We'd be a damn sight better than half-way along the processing that the Kelsey people do in Louisville. They grow the first culture from the Rosen batch, then they cull out all the competing enzymes, then they grew what's left and cull, for hundreds of stages, to get a percentage of the living virus to grow a pure culture they can crop and start crystalizing."

"How about it, Nick?" Tony demanded. "Could the Lab swing a job of crystalizing a crop from that and processing it for absorption?"

"Sure," said Nick. "That's the easy part. I've been reading up on it since we talked about it before."

"Look here," Gracey exploded, "where do you think you're going to get your living virus from? You have to keep getting it, you know. It always mutates under normal radiation sooner or later, and you have to start over again."

"That's my end of the deal. I have a hunch I can get it. Thanks, both of you." He went into the nursery and told Polly calmly: "I'm taking your youngster away again—just for a few minutes, though. I want to check his lungs in the hospital. Anna?" She was already taking the baby from Polly's arms. Tony picked up the wrapped marcaine-box and started out.

"Hey, Doc, what goes on?" Gracey demanded.

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He brushed past Nick and the puzzled agronomist. "Tell you later," he called back.

On the street, Anna turned a worried face up to his. "Tony, what are you *doing?* You can't operate on a five-day-old baby . . . can you?" she finished, less certainly. "You seem so—so happy and *sure* of yourself."

"I am," he said shortly, and then relented enough to add: "The 'operation,' if you want to call it that, won't hurt him." But he wouldn't say any more.

MIMI and Brenner were in Tony's living room. The woman said hopelessly: "Hello, Tony. Mr. Brenner's made an offer —Oh! It's Sunny!"

"Hello, Mimi," said Tony.

"The youngster, eh?" Brenner said genially. "I've heard about him."

With a brusque "Excuse me" to the drug manufacturer, Tony said to Anna in an undertone: "Rig the op table, sterilites on. Get out the portable biopsy constant-temperature bath and set the thermostat to Sunny's blood temperature. And call me."

She nodded and went into the hospital with the baby. Tony dropped his bundle into his trunk and began to scrub up.

"What's been going on, Mimi?" he asked.

"Mr. Brenner's offered five million, five hundred thousand dollars for Sun Lake's assets. I said the Council would put it in formal shape and call a vote."

The descent from his peak of inspiration was sickening. Nothing had changed, then, Tony thought.

"Ready," Anna said at his side. He followed her silently into the hospital, slipped into his gloves and said: "Sterilize the Byers curette, third extension, and lubricate. Sterilize a small oral speculum." He spoke quietly. Graham was asleep in the bed across the room.

Anna didn't move. "Anesthesia?" she asked.

"None. We don't know their body-chemistry well enough."

"No, Tony. Please, no!"

He felt only a chill determination that he was going to salvage some of the wreckage of Sun Lake, determination and more confidence than he knew he should feel. Anna turned, selected the instruments and slipped them into the sterilizer. The doctor stepped on the pedal that turned on the op lights.

Anna put the speculum into his hand and he clamped open Sunny's mouth. The prompt wail of protest turned to a strangled cry as the sinuous shaft of the Byers curette slid down the trachea into the left bronchus. One steady hand guided the instrument, while the other manipulated the controls from a bulb at its base.

"*Hold* him," Tony growled as Anna's hands weakened and the woman swayed. Bronchus, bronchia,

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bronchile, probing and withdrawing at resistances—and there it was. A pressure on the central control that uncovered the razor-sharp little spoon at the tip of the flexible shaft and covered it again, and then all flexure controls off and out. It had taken less than five seconds, and one more to deposit the shred of lung tissue in the biopsy constant-temperature nutrient bath.

Hank was at the door. Anna, leaning feebly against the table, straightened to tell him: "Go and lie down, Hank. It's all right."

"Keep him away from me," warned Graham from the bed. "He was going to jump me before."

"I just wanted to see the baby," Hank said apologetically.

Tony turned to the intercom, buzzing the Kandros'. "Come on over," he told them. "You can have your baby back for keeps now. Is Gracey still there? Joe? I think I've got that tissue specimen for you. How fast can you get a test?"

"For God's sake, Tony, where did you get it?" Gracey was demanding on the other end.

"From a Brownie." He couldn't resist it. "That's what I said. Lung tissue of a Brownie."

He hung up.

"A Brownie? It *is* true! There are Brownies, aren't there?"

Tony turned to find the Kandros standing by the examination table. Polly already had her baby in her arms.

Jim patted her shoulder. "He doesn't really mean it, Polly. Do you, Doc?"

Graham was grinning openly.

Tony turned from one to the other, not answering.

There was a commotion in the living room and Brenner burst in, carrying a familiar box. "He just dived for it, Tony," Mimi said. "He said it was . . ."

"Careful!" said the doctor. "You'll spray marcaine all over the place. Put it down, man!"

BRENNER did, and unwrapped it with practiced precision. "My stuff, Doctor," he said. "Think I don't know my own crates? Mrs. Jonathan, my price for your assets has just dropped to two and one-half million. And I am now in a position to prosecute. I hope none of you will make difficulties."

Jim Kandro said, "I don't know what this is all about, but we need that stuff for Sunny."

"You don't *believe* that, do you?" the drug maker asked scornfully.

"I don't know what to believe," said Kandro. "But he's—different. And it makes sense. He doesn't have to take OxEn, so he has to take something else. You better leave it for us, Mr. Brenner."

The drug maker looked at Jim wisely. "It's okay, Mac," he decided. "If you've got the habit and you can't kick it, why don't you come to work for me? I can use

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you. And you don't have to take so much. The micron dust in the air takes your edge off—"

"That's not it," said Kandro. "Why don't you listen to me? We need that stuff for Sunny. The doctor says so and he ought to know. It's medicine, like vitamins. You wouldn't keep vitamins from a little baby, would you?"

Graham snickered.

KANDRO turned and lectured angrily: "You stay out of this. There hasn't been anything but trouble since you got here. Now you could at least keep from braying while a man's trying to reason with somebody. You may be smart and a big writer, but you don't have any manners at all if you can't keep quiet at a time like this."

He turned to Brenner. "You know we don't have any money here, or I'd offer you what we had. I guess the box is yours, and nobody has a claim to it except you. But Polly and me can get permission from the Council to go and work out whatever the box would cost. Couldn't we, Tony? Mimi? The rest would let us, wouldn't they?"

"I'm sorry, Mac," the drug maker said. "I wish I could make you understand, but if I can't, that doesn't matter. This box is going with me. It's evidence in a crime."

"Mr. Brenner," Jim Kandro said thickly, "I can't let you out of here with that box. We need it for Sunny. I told you and told you. Now give it here." He put out one huge hand.

"How about it, Mrs. Jonathan?" Brenner seemed to be ignoring the big man's menacing advance. "Two and a half million? It's a very reasonable price, all things considered. Your new father here would be glad to take it."

"I'll take it, all right," growled Jim. "Hand it over. Right now." He was a scant four feet from the drug maker; Brenner's eyes were still fixed mockingly on Mimi Jonathan.

Kandro took one more step forward and Anna cried faintly: "No!"

Brenner stepped back and there was a large pistol in his hand. "This," he told them, "is *fully* automatic. It keeps firing as long as I hold the trigger down. Now for the last time listen, all of you. I'm going, and I'm taking my box with me. If you try to stop me, I have a perfect right to use this gun. You know better than I do what fingerprints the authorities will find on the box. You're caught red-handed and I won't have any trouble proving it to my man Bell. If you people decide to be reasonable instead, you better let me know —soon."

Mimi Jonathan said clearly: "So you're going to throw us off Mars, Mr. Brenner?"

"If necessary," he said, not following.

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"You mean you're going to kick us out and we'll never see Mars again? And all the sacrifices we've made here will be a joke?"

He didn't get what she was driving at. "Yes," he said irritably. "You're quite right—"

He was cut off by Hank, broken at last under the goading. The youngster sprang, raving, at Brenner, bowling him over as the pistol roared in a gush of bullets that ripped Hank's body.

And then there was a silence into which Sunny Kandro shrieked his fear and dismay. Mimi leaned against the wall and shut her eyes. She wanted to vomit. She heard Tony's awed whisper: ". . . smashed his trachea . . . broke his neck . . . belly shot clean out . . ." She shuddered, and hoped and feared that she'd carry this guilt alone to the grave.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

"COME on, Polly. You come out here." Kandro led his wife, still carrying Sunny, out to the living room.

Faces were peering through the hospital window and they heard Nick Cantrella shouting: "Let me through, damnit! Clear away from that door!" And he was in, latching the door from the street. He snapped the curtains shut with an angry yank. "What in God's name happened? I was coming for that tissue culture and now this—"

"Don't worry about it," said Graham drily and with effort from the bed. "Just a little useful murder. Hank Radcliff, hero of the Colony, gives his life to save the world from Big Bad Brenner—sweet Jesus!" he swore in awed delight. "*What* a story! 'The Killing of Hugo Brenner'—an eye-witness account by Douglas Graham! Swee-eet Jesus! Didn't Brenner know who I was?"

Mimi started. "I guess not," she realized. "I never told him."

"You're plenty beat up," Tony pointed out. "He wouldn't have recognized you. Hey, Nick, let's get those bodies out of here."

"Beat up is right," Graham chortled, "and it was worth it! Thank *you,* my friends, whichever one of you—or how many was it?—did that job on me. I thank you from the bottom of my poor old gunther's heart. Just to be able to lie here and listen to all that!"

"I don't know who did it last time." Nick took one menacing step toward the bed. "But, by God, if you're starting on another of your yarns, I know who's going to . . ."

"Nick, wait a minute. You don't know what he heard."

"Hey, Cantrella, I need a hand here."

"I *know* who did it." Anna had to shout to make herself heard above Mimi and Tony, both talking at once. In the sudden silence, she said: "Didn't I tell you, Tony? I guess it was while you were away

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that I found out. *They* did it. I think he was planning to hurt the baby. Or they thought he was."

"*They?*" the writer asked contemptuously. "Brownies again? You're a good second-guesser, Miss Willendorf, but you missed out this time. The only designs I ever had on the Kandro kid were to get him back to Earth where he could be properly cared for—instead of getting marcaine dosed out to him to cover up for Mama."

"LISTEN, you lying crimp." Nick continued his arrested advance on Graham. "If you think you're safe to turn out more of that kind of stuff just because you're laid up in bed, you better start thinking all over again. I've got no compunctions about kicking a rat when he's down."

"Nick! Stop it!" Swift and sure and deadly sharp, Mimi's voice came across the room like a harpoon. "Give him a chance! You didn't hear what *he* heard—what Brenner said. I don't see how anybody could get a story against Sun Lake out of it."

"Thank you kindly, ma'm." Graham grinned painfully. "Good to know somebody around here is still sane. Don't tell me you go for this Brownie nonsense too!"

"I—don't know," she said. "If I'd heard it from anybody but Tony and Anna, I wouldn't believe a word of it. But they *did* get the baby back."

"Back from where?"

Tony realized for the first time that Graham didn't even know about Sunny's kidnaping. And the others, for that matter, still didn't know what had happened in the cave.

"Listen," he said. "If you'll all take it easy for a few minutes, Anna and I have a lot to tell you. But first . . . Nick, help me move them to the living room floor. Anna, get blankets to cover them."

"Wait a minute." She went into the living room. "All right," she called back a moment later, and Tony and Nick together carried what was left of Hank through the door. "I wanted to get the Kandros out first," Anna explained, locking the front door again.

They laid out Brenner's body next to Hank's, and covered them both with blankets. The two men started back to the hospital, but Anna laid her hand on Tony's arm to stop him.

"Could I see you a minute?"

"Of course." He let Nick go ahead, then asked, worried, "Ansie, darling, what's the matter?"

She closed the door firmly between them and the others in the hospital.

"Tony, we can't tell them," she said. "Not now."

"Why not? They've got to know."

"Don't you *see?* We shouldn't have talked as much as we did. We shouldn't have said or done any-

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thing in front of Graham, but he doesn't believe it yet. If we convince him—Tony, the Brownies are terrified of people. They've kept away from people all along. For a reason. Don't you *see?*" she asked urgently. "Think what would happen to them. Think! I got just a flash from Graham's mind when I said *they* did it, before he decided to be skeptical. It was brutal. They'd be exterminated . . ."

He did see it. She was right. He thought of Hackenburg over at Pittco, and Brownies being worked in the mines—"native labor." He thought of what an Earth power would give to have telepaths in its military intelligence. He thought of the horror and hatred people would feel for the "mind-reading monsters." He thought of Brownies in zoos, on dissecting tables . . .

HE thought of Sun Lake, still facing a charge of theft; of the difference it would make in Graham's story if he knew it *wasn't* Sun Lakers who attacked him. He thought of what the existence of the Brownies would mean to medical and biochemical research. And he made up his mind.

Anna looked away with anger in her eyes, hopelessness in the set of her shoulders.

"Why?" she begged. "They're—oh, Tony, they're *decent!* Not like most people."

"Because *we* know about them, that's why. Because you can't—you just *can't* keep a secret like that. Because it means too much to men, to all men, to mankind, or whatever part of it survives the end of Earth. Anna, Sun Lake may not be the answer to our future—the Brownies may be. Have you thought of that? They need us, they need to learn some of the things our civilization has to offer—and we need them. That piece of tissue I took from Sunny's lungs may mean the end of dependence on Earth for OxEn, and that's just one first thing. There's no knowing how much we can learn, how they can help us to adapt, what new knowledge will come out of the contact. We *can't* keep it to ourselves. That's all there is to it."

"There's no use arguing, is there?"

"I'm afraid not," he said as gently as he could. He opened the door. "Are you coming back?"

She hesitated, then followed.

ii

"THAT'S it," Tony wound up the narrative of their visit to the cave, and then repeated, this time to Graham: "That's it. But I think you ought to know that Anna was trying to persuade me not to tell this story in front of you, to let you go on not believing in Brownies. She was afraid of what people would do to them once it became known. I'm afraid too. What you write will have a lot to

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do with it." He paused. "What *are* you going to write?"

"I'm damned if I know!" Graham tried to lift his head, and decided against it. "It's either the most ingenious yarn I've ever heard —it covers every single accusation against you people, from marcaine theft to mayhem on my person— or it's the biggest story in the world. And I'm damned if I know which!"

He relapsed into a thoughtful silence, broken suddenly by the roar of a large plane. An instant later there was the noise of a second, and then a third. One at a time they came closer, and died out.

"That would be Bell." Mimi stood up wearily. "I don't mind saying I'm confused. What do we do now?"

"He's coming," Tony reminded her, "to help Mr. Graham. Perhaps we should leave it up to our guest to tell the Commissioner whatever he sees fit."

The writer was silent, stony-faced.

"There's a slight matter of a couple of stiffs in the living room," Nick reminded them. "The Commish might want to know about them. Strictly inter-colony stuff."

"You know," Graham broke in suddenly, "if I was dumb enough to believe your story about Brownies—and if your little experiment with the kid's lungs works—Sun Lake could get to be quite a place."

"How do you mean?" Gracey asked.

"The way Mr. Brenner had it figured, your Lab is practically made to order for marcaine manufacture. And I gather you think you can turn out OxEn too, if that lung tissue is good. If there's anything behind all this Brownie talk —well, you've got a deal that looks worth a trillion. You can supply OxEn to all of Mars at what price? It wouldn't cost you anything compared to Earth-import . . ."

He looked around the circle of astonished faces.

"Don't tell me none of you even *thought* of that? Not even *you?*" he appealed to Mimi.

She shook her head. "That's not the Sun Lake idea," she said stiffly. "We wouldn't be interested."

Anna smiled, very slightly, and there was a violent banging at the front door.

iii

TONY went slowly through the living room. The door was beginning to shake under the blows.

"Cut that out and I'll open it!" he yelled. There was silence as he swung the door open. A sergeant of the guards, three others, and Bell, who was well in the rear. He must have known there'd been shooting.

"What's been going on?" the Commissioner began. He sniffed the air and his eyes traveled to the

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covered bodies. "Graham? If it is, we might have a murder arrest. His dispatch gave you people plenty of motive."

"No. Brenner," Tony said shortly. "And a young man named Hank Radcliff."

Bell, starting for the figures, recoiled. "Sergeant," he said, and gestured. The non-com gingerly drew back the blankets, exposing the drug maker's face. The Commissioner stared for a long moment and said hoarsely: "Cover it, Sergeant." He turned to Tony. "What happened?"

"We have a disinterested witness," said the doctor. "Douglas Garham. He saw the whole thing."

TONY led the way into the hospital. The sergeant followed, then the Commissioner. Graham said from his bed: "Visiting a dead friend?"

Bell snapped: "It's an inter-colony crime. Murder. Obviously I can't take the word of anybody who's a member of this community. Did you witness the killing?"

"I was a witness, all right," said Graham. "Best damn witness you ever saw. Billions of readers hang on my every word." He made an effort and raised himself on one elbow. "Remember the chummy sessions we used to have in Washington, Bell?"

On the Commissioner's forehead, sweat formed.

"Here's the story of the killing," said Graham. "Brenner pulled his gun on a man named Kandro during a little dispute. He threatened to kill Kandro, went into some detail about how fully automatic that gun was and—let me think—his exact words were 'spray the room.' With a babe in arms present. Think of it, Bell! Not even you would have done a thing like that; not even in the old days. The Radcliff kid jumped Brenner and took all the slugs in his belly. I guess they were dumdums, because the gun looked to me like a .38 and none of them went through. Only the Radcliff boy squashed Brenner's neck before he knew he was dead. Reminded me of a time once in Asia—"

Bell cut him off. "Did Brenner die right away? Did he—say anything before he died?"

"Deathbed confession? Delirious rambling? No."

The Commissioner relaxed perceptibly.

"*But,*" said the newsman, "He talked quite a bit *before* he pulled the gun. He didn't recognize me with my battered face and I didn't introduce myself. He thought it was just a bunch of Sun Lakers in here and that nobody would believe a word they said about him. Brenner talked quite a bit."

"Sergeant!" Bell broke in. "I won't be needing you for a while. Wait for me in the other room. And see to it nobody touches those bodies!"

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THE door closed behind the non-com, and Graham laughed. "Maybe you do know, eh, Commish? Maybe you know Brenner liked to refer to you as 'my man Bell'?"

The Commissioner's eyes ran unhappily around the room. "You people," he said. "Get out. All of you. Leave us alone—so I can take a statement."

"No," said Graham, "they stay here. I'm not a strong man these days, but Brenner talked quite a bit. I wouldn't want anything to stop me from getting the story to an eagerly waiting world."

Bell looked around hopelessly. Tony saw Nick's face twist into a knowing, malevolent grin; like the others, he made an effort to imitate it.

"What do you want, Graham?" asked the Commissioner. "What are you trying to get at?"

"Not a thing," the writer said blandly. "By the way, in my statement on the killing, should I include what Brenner had to say about you? He mentioned some financial matters, too. Would they be relevant?"

Tony tried to remember what financial matters Brenner had discussed, aside from the price he offered for the Colony. None—but Graham was a shrewd bluffer.

The Commissioner made a last effort to pull himself together. "You can't intimidate me, Graham," he rasped. "And don't think I can't be tough if you force my hand. I'm in the clear. I don't care what Brenner said; I haven't done a thing."

"*Yet*," said the writer succinctly. "Your part was to come later, wasn't it?"

Bell's face seemed to collapse.

"Still think you can get tough?" Graham jeered. "Try it, and I guarantee that you'll be hauled back to Earth on the next rocket, to be tried for malfeasance, exceeding your authority, accepting bribes and violating the narcotics code. I can also guarantee that you will be convicted and imprisoned for the rest of your life. Don't try to bluff me, you tin-horn sport. I've been bluffed by experts."

THE Commissioner began shrilly, "I won't stand for—" and cracked. "For God's sake, Graham, be reasonable! What have I ever done to you? What do you want? Tell me what you want!"

The writer fell back on the bed. "Nothing right now, thanks. If I think of anything, I'll let you know."

The Commissioner started to speak, and couldn't. Tony saw the veins of tension stand out. He saw, too, how Anna's lip was curling in disgust.

Graham seemed amused. "There *is* one thing, Commish. An intercolony matter under your jurisdiction, I believe. Will you remove those carcasses on your way out?

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You'd be surprised how sensitive I am about such things."

He closed his eyes and waited till the door was shut behind the departing guest. When he opened them again, all the self-assurance was gone out of them.

"Doc," he moaned, "give me a shot. When I got up on my elbow something tore. God, it hurts!"

While Tony took care of him, Joe Gracey said: "It was a grand performance, Mr. Graham. Thank you for what you did."

"I can undo it," the reporter said flatly, "or I can use it any way I want to. If you people have been lying to me . . ." He sighed with relief. "Thanks, Doc. That's a help. Now if you want anything out of *my* man Bell—show me one of your Brownies!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

GRAHAM'S challenge fell into a silent room. Everyone waited for Tony to speak; Tony waited for Anna.

"I don't see why not," she said at last. "I guess they'd do it." She looked despairingly at Tony. "Is this the *only* way?" she pleaded.

"It's the only way you're going to beat that marcaine-theft rap," Graham answered for him.

"All right. I'll go out there in the morning. I think I can talk them into it."

"If you don't mind, Miss Willendorf, I'd rather it was right now. In twelve hours, your hot-shot engineer here could probably *build* a Brownie."

"I can try," she said. "But I can't promise. Not even for tomorrow. I only think I can talk one of them into coming here. I don't know how they'll feel about it."

Graham grinned. "That's about how I figured it," he said. "Thanks, folks. It was a good show while it lasted."

"We're going," Tony said grimly. "And we'll bring you back a Brownie."

"Still not good enough," the writer said. "If you go, I go with you. You mind if I'm just a little suspicious?"

"It's ten kilometers to the Rimrocks," Tony told him. "Most of it by half track, the rest by stretcher for you."

"The hell with your humanitarian sentiments! It's your medical opinion, if any, that I want!"

"You'll live. No danger of that."

"All right," the writer said. "When do we start?"

Tony looked questioningly at Anna, who nodded. "Right now," the doctor said, "or any time you're ready." He opened a cabinet and fished out a patent-syringe ampoule. "This should make it easier." He started to open the package.

"No, thanks," Graham said. "I want to see what *I* see—if anything." His eyes went swiftly from one face to another, studying them for reactions.

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"If you can take it, I can," the doctor told him. But he dropped the package in his pocket before they left.

IN THE rattling half track, with Anna driving and Tony in the truck body beside Graham, the writer said through clenched teeth: "God help you if you tell me the Brownies aren't biting tonight. It's a damn-fool notion anyway. You've been telling me Brownies are born of Earth people. Why aren't there any born on Earth?"

"It's because of what the geneticists call a lethal gene. Polly and Jim, for instance. Each one of them had a certain lethal gene in their heredity. Either of them could have married somebody without the lethal gene and had ordinary babies, on Earth or on Mars, because the gene is a recessive. On Earth, when Polly's lethal gene and Jim's lethal gene matched, it was fatal to their offspring. They never came to term; the gene produced a foetus which couldn't survive the womb on Earth. I don't know what factors are involved in that failure —cosmic rays, the gravity or what. But on Mars the foetus comes to term and is—a Brownie.

"A Brownie is a Martian. They don't just *accept* Mars air like an Earthman with Marsworthy lungs. They can't *stand* Earth air. And they need a daily ration of marcaine to grow and live. That's who stole Brenner's marcaine. That's why they slipped marcaine into Polly Kandro's food. They wanted her to pass it to Sunny in her milk. When we put Sunny on the bottle, they stole him so they could give him marcaine. They surrendered him on our promise to see that he got it."

"And that's a perfect cover-story for a dope-addict mama," scoffed the writer. "How many Brownies are there supposed to be?"

"A couple of hundred. I suppose about half of them are first-generation. There must have been a very few in the beginning, children of homesteaders abandoned on a desert ranch when their parents died, who crawled out and lived off the country, chewing marcaine out of the weed. And they must have 'stolen' other Brownie babies from other homesteaders when they grew."

Graham swore against the pain. "The Kandro kid looks as normal as any other baby. How are the Brownies supposed to know he isn't? Does he give them a password?"

Tony explained wearily: "They are telepathic. It explains a lot of things—why they're only seen by people they want to see them, why they could steal Brenner's marcaine and not get caught. They can hear people coming—their thoughts, that is. That's why they beat up Big Ginny; she was aborting a Brownie baby. Why they beat the hell out of you. Why they sensibly

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keep away from most Earth people."

"Except Red Sand Jim Granata, eh?"

"Granata was a liar. He probably never saw a Brownie in his life. He heard all the Brownie yarns and used them to put on good commercial shows."

Anna maneuvered the half track around a spur of rock picked out by the headlights and ground the vehicle to a stop. "It's too rugged from here on," she said. "We'll have to carry him the rest of the way."

"You warm enough? Another blanket?" asked Tony.

"You're really going through with this, aren't you?" said the writer. "I'm crazy to play along, but *if*—*if* this is a story and I get beaten on it—Oh, hell, yes, I'm warm enough. Stretcher ought to be easier going than this tin can."

ANNA led, with Graham swaying between them on a shoulder-suspended litter that left the bearers' hands free. The writer's weight was not much of a burden in this gravity. Both she and Tony used torches to pick their way among the scree that had dribbled for millenia, one stone at a time, down the weathering Rimrocks. They smelled the acrid fumes of Pittco across the hills, fouling the night air, and Graham began to cough.

"Anna?" asked the doctor.

She knew what he meant, and said shortly: "Not yet."

Another hundred meters, and Tony felt her begin to pull off to the right. Her "homing" led them to the foot of the mesalike hills a few meters from a cave mouth. They headed in.

"Quite soon," said Anna, and then: "We can put him down."

"Be very quiet," Tony told the writer. He himself felt the faint, eerie "touch" of a Brownie in his mind. "They're very sensitive to . . ."

"*Gargh!*" shrieked Graham as a Brownie stepped into the beam from Anna's light. It clapped its hands over its ears and fled.

"Now see what you did!" raged Anna in an angry whisper. "Their ears—you almost deafened him."

"Get him back!" The writer's voice was tremulous.

"I don't know if I can," Anna said coldly. "He doesn't have to take orders from you *or* me. All I can do is try."

"You'd better. It scared the hell out of me, I admit, but so did the Brownies in Granata's Interplanetary Show, and they were fakes."

"Man, didn't you *feel* it?" asked Tony incredulously.

"What?" asked Graham.

"Please be quiet, both of you!"

They waited a long time in the cold corridor before the thing reappeared, stepping warily into the circle of light.

Suddenly Anna laughed. "He

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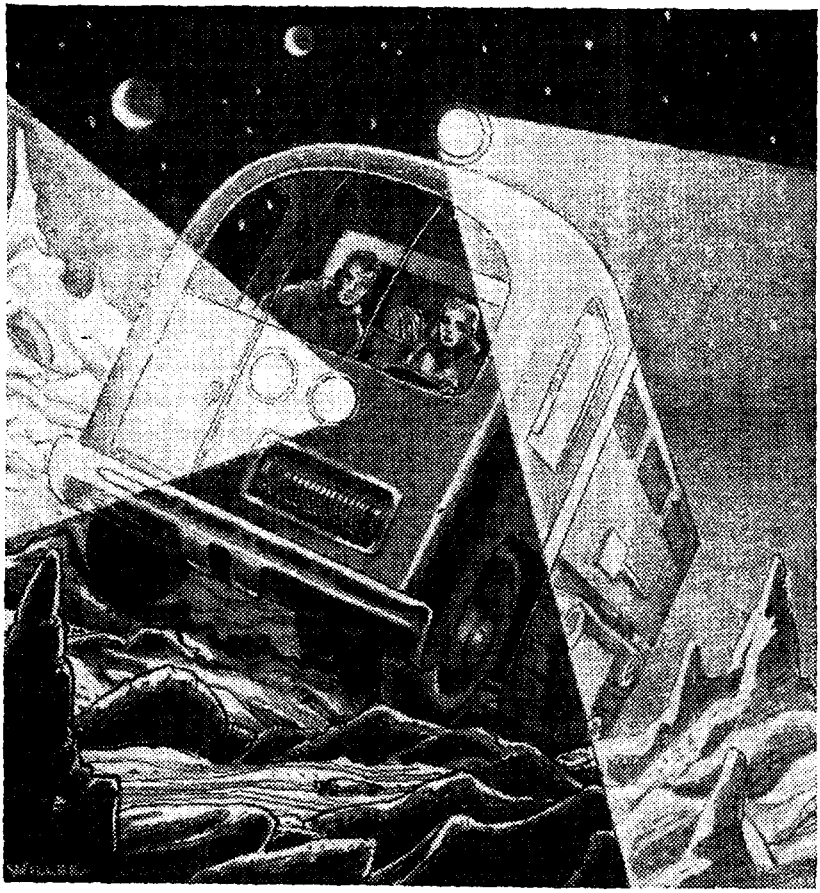

wants to know why you want to pull his ears off. He sees you thinking of pulling his ears and the ears coming off and he's as puzzled as he can be."

"Shrewd guess," said Graham. "Do I get to pull them?"

"No. If you have any questions, tell me, and I'll try to ask him."

"I think it's a fake. Come out from behind those whiskers, whoever you are. Stillman? Gracey? No, you're too short. I'll bet you're that little punk Tad Campbell from the radio shack. I'd like to get my hands on those flapping ears just for one second."

"This isn't getting us anywhere," said Tony. "Graham, you think of a person or a scene or something,

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the Brownie will get it telepathically, give it to Anna and she'll say what it is."

"Fair enough," said the writer. "I don't know what it's supposed to prove, but it's some kind of test. I'm thinking."

A moment later Anna said evenly: "If you weren't beaten up already, I'd slap your face off."

"I'm sorry," said Graham hastily. "I was only kidding. I didn't really think it would—but it did, didn't it?" With mounting excitement he said: "Ask him who he is, who his people were, whether he's married, how old he is—"

Anna held up her hand. "That's enough to start. I can't think of any way to ask his name. His parents—not Brownies, homesteaders—a shack and a goat—a kitchen garden—tall, tall people, the man wears thick glasses—Tony! It's the Tollers!"

"That's impossible," he said. "Their son's on Earth. He never answers their letters," the doctor remembered. "They keep writing, and—How old was he when he left?"

"I don't know," she answered a moment later. "He doesn't understand the question."

"I felt it," said the writer, suddenly, in a frightened voice. "Like a thing touching you inside your head. Is that him?"

"That's him. Just don't fight it."

After a long silence Graham said quietly: "Hell, he's all right. They're all-right people, aren't they?"

"Do you want to ask him any more questions?" asked Anna.

"A million of them. But not right now. Can I come back again?" asked the writer slowly and heavily. "When I'm in better shape?" He waited for Anna's nod, then said: "Will you say thanks to him and get me to the 'track?"

"Pain worse?" asked Tony.

"No, I don't think so. Hell, I don't know. As a matter of fact, I'm just worn out."

The Brownie glided from the circle of light. "'By, fella," said Graham, and then grinned weakly. "He said good-by back at me!"

Swaying between them on the litter on the way back to the 'track, the writer said at last; "Two System beats. Eyewitness account of Drug King Brenner's death, and the first factual eyewitness account of extraterrestrial intelligent life. One newsman per century gets one story like this. *And I've got two!*"

They loaded him into the half-track. He broke silence only once on the bumpy trip back to Sun Lake, saying with a chuckle: "I think he *liked* me." And then he fell quietly asleep.

ii

GRACEY and Nick and half a dozen of the biochem lab boys were waiting for them at the hospital. Joe must have been watching

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out the window, because he ran out to meet them.

It was late, and the lights were already out in most of the double row of rust-brown huts. But Joe Gracey, the quiet one, the gentle ex-professor, possessor of eternal calm and detachment, came flying down the dim street, shouting: "Doc! Tony! *We've got it!*"

"Sh-h . . ." Tony nodded toward the dozing man on the shoulder litter, but Graham was already opening his eyes.

"What's up?" he asked mushily. "What's all excitement?"

"Nothing at all," the doctor tried to tell him. "We're back in the Colony. And you're going to bed. Hold on just a minute, will you, Joe?" He knew how Gracey felt; it was hard enough to restrain his own jubilance and keep his voice in neutral register. But Graham had had enough for one night, and Tony had to get his patient back to the hospital bed before he could take time to listen even to such news as Gracey bore.

Joe helped them get the writer comfortably settled, and waited impatiently while the doctor made a quick check for any possible damage done by the trip. Finally, Anna pulled up the covers, and the three of them started out.

"Oh, Doctor . . ." Tony turned to find Graham up again on one elbow, wide-eyed and not a bit sleepy. "I was just wondering if I could have my typewriter." Before Tony could answer, the elbow collapsed and Graham smiled ruefully. "I guess not. I couldn't work it. You don't have anything as luxurious as an Earthside dictatyper in the place, do you?"

"Sure," Tony told him. "We've got one in the Lab office. You get some rest now, and we'll set it up for you here in the morning."

"I'm okay," Graham insisted. "There's something I'd like to get on paper right away. I won't be able to sleep anyhow if I don't get it done."

"You'll sleep," the doctor said. "I can give you a shot."

"No." Graham was determined. "If you can't get the dictatyper out here now, how about some pencil and paper? I *think* I still know how to use them."

"I'll see what we can do. Anna, will you come with me?"

TONY led her, not to the living room where the others were waiting, but into the bedroom. "How about it?" he asked in a whisper. "How's he feeling?"

"It's a funny mixture, Tony," she said, "but I think it's all right. He's not nearly as excited as he was before. He's eager, but calm and—well, it's hard to express, but *honest*, too."

"Right." He tightened his hand swiftly on her shoulder, and smiled down at her small earnest face. "A man could get too used to this," he said. "How do you suppose I

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got along before I knew about you?"

He strode into the living room and consulted briefly with Nick, after which two of the men from the biochem section tramped out to the Lab, and brought back the machine for Graham to use.

Through the living room door, Tony heard the writer's voice droning on, dictating, and the soft tapping of the machine. But what was going on in the hospital didn't seem important.

THE thing that mattered was the tiny pinch of pink powder Nick and Joe had been waiting to show him.

"Tony," said Nick, exultantly, "look at this stuff! It's damn near oral-administration OxEn. Took it through twelve stages of concentration and we'll take it through exactly three more to completion when Anna blows some hyvac cells for us. I tried and all I got was blistered fingers."

"It works?" asked Tony.

"It's beautiful," said Gracey. "The Kelsey people must have fifty contaminants they don't even suspect are there. Now I want to know where that sample tissue came from and where you're going to get more. And what did you mean about Brownies?"

"Didn't Nick tell you?" Tony looked from the puzzled face to the startled one, and chortled appreciatively. "You mean you've been working together on this thing all evening and you never . . .?"

"He didn't ask," Cantrella said defensively. "Anyhow, we weren't working together. We weren't even in the same Lab."

"Okay," Tony grinned, "here goes again. You gave me the idea originally, Joe. As much as any one person or thing did. You were talking the other day about lethal genes. Remember, I tried to ask you about it this afternoon?"

"When Mimi blew up? Sure."

"That's when it hit me. I got that lung tissue from Sunny Kandro, Joe. After we brought him home. He's a Brownie . . . the result of a Mars-viable gene that's lethal on Earth."

"And there are more of them?" Gracey leaned forward excitedly. "Are they cooperative? Will they answer questions? And submit to examination? When can I see one?"

"They're cooperative," Anna said, smiling. "The reason you haven't seen one yet is that they can't stand humans—too uncooperative to suit them. Examinations? I don't see why not, if your intentions are honorable. They're telepaths, so they'd know you didn't mean to harm them."

"Telepaths!" Gracey breathed the word as Nick exclaimed it. "What other changes," the agronomist started to ask, then said instead: "No sense you telling me. I *will* see one? Soon?"

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ANNA nodded. "Why not? They were willing to talk to him." She motioned to the closed hospital door.

"How about new tissue then?" Joe asked her. "Can we get it when we need it? You know how this stuff works? The old culture keeps mutating, and you have to start it over again. We can't keep taking slices out of Sunny all the time."

"I don't know," she had to admit. "I don't know if they could understand what you want it for, or why you're doing it."

"I don't think we'll have any trouble," Tony put in. "Nick, our Lab is equipped to turn out marcaine, isn't it?"

"Well, hell—yes, of course, but what for?"

"Marcaine and OxEn both? Do we have the facilities for it?"

"Sure. Processing the OxEn won't take up much."

"Then I'm sure we can get our lung-scrapings," the doctor said. "What do you say, Ansie?" The name slipped out, and he never even noticed the sudden startled exchange of looks between the other men. He did notice the woman's slight hesitation and half-hidden smile. "Will they do it? After all, you're the expert on Brownies."

"They like us," she said thoughtfully. "They trust us, too. They need marcaine. Yes, I think they'd do it."

"Doc!" It was Graham, calling from inside. Tony opened the door. "There anything left in that bottle of mine?"

"Hasn't been touched."

"Pour me a shot, will you? A good, long one. I'm not in such hot shape. And pass the bottle around."

Tony filled a glass generously. "Take it and go to sleep," he ordered. "You're going to feel worse tomorrow."

"Thanks. That's what I call a bedside manner."

Graham grinned and tossed off the drink with a happy shudder. "I've got some copy here," he said. "Can Stillman get it out tonight?"

TONY took the typed paper from the dictating machine and paused a moment, irresolutely.

Graham laughed sleepily. "It's in the clear," he said. "No code. And you can read it if you like. Two messages and Take One of the biggest running story of the century."

"Thanks," said Tony. "Good night." He closed the door firmly behind him.

"Story from Graham," he said to the group. He buzzed Harve.

"Read it!" said Nick. "And if that lying rat pulls another—"

Tony gathered courage at last to run his eyes over the copy, and gasped with relief.

"'Message to Marsport communications,'" he read. "'Kill all copy previously sent for upcoming

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substitutes. Douglas Graham.' And 'Message to Commissioner Hamilton Bell, Marsport, Administration. As interested lay observer strongly urge you withdraw intended application of Title Fifteen search cordon to Sun Lake Colony. Personal investigation convinces me theft allegations unfounded, Title Fifteen application grave injustice which my duty expose fullest before public and official circles on return Earth. Appreciate you message me acknowledgment. Douglas Graham.' "

NICK'S yell of triumph hit the roof. "What are we waiting for?" he demanded. "Where's Mimi? We have packing to do!"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Harve Stillman, coming in.

Tony was reading the last of the messages to himself.

Anna told him: "You like that one best of all. What's in it?"

He looked up with a grin across his face. "I'm sorry," he said. "This is how it starts: 'Marsport communications, sub following for previous copy, which kill. By Douglas Graham. With Brownies, lead to come.' Harve, what does that mean?"

The ex-wire-serviceman snapped: "It's additional copy on a story about Brownies—the first part isn't ready to go yet. What's he *say,* Tony?"

The doctor read happily: " 'The administrative problems raised by this staggering discovery are not great. It is fortunate that Dr. Hellman and Miss Willendorf, co-discoverers of the Martians, are persons of unquestioned integrity, profoundly interested in protecting the new race from exploitation. I intend to urge the appointment of one of them as special Commissioner for the P.A.C. to take charge of Brownie welfare and safety. There must be no repetition of the tragedies that marked Earthly colonial expansion when greedy and shortsighted—' "

"Damn, that's great," muttered the radio man. "Let me file it."

The doctor, with the grin still on his face, handed over the copy and Harve raced out.

"I told you," said Anna.

Joe Gracey said: "Well, I certainly hope whichever one of you turns out to be Commissioner is going to give us Lab men a decent chance at research on the Brownies. I was thinking—I could probably work out a test for the lethal gene, or Brownie gene, better call it. Spermatozoa for a male, a polar body or an ovum from a female and we'd be able to tell—"

"No!" said Anna hysterically. "No, no!"

The others were shocked into silence.

"I'll take you home, Ansie," said Tony

He took her arm and they walked out into the icy night down the Colony street.

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"Ansie, I've been sort of taking things for granted. I should ask you once, for the record." He stopped walking and faced her. "Will you marry me?"

"Oh, *Tony!*" The name exploded from her in fear and desire both. "Tony, how *can* we? I thought—for just a little while after I told you about me, I thought perhaps we could, that life could be the way it is for other people. But now this. How *can* we?"

"What are you afraid of?"

"Afraid? I'm afraid of our children, afraid of this planet! I was never afraid before, I was hurt and bewildered when I knew too much about people, but—Tony, don't you *see?* To have a baby like Polly's, to have it grow up a stranger, an alien creature, to have it leave me and go to its—its *own* people . . ."

HE TOOK her hand and began walking again, searching for the words he needed.

"Ansie," he began, "I think we will be married. If you want it as much as I do, we surely will be. And we'll have children. And more than that, the hope of all the race will lie in our children, Anna. Ours and the children of the other people here. And the children of the Brownies. Don't forget that.

"They look different. They even think differently, and nobody knows more about that than you. But they're as human as we are. Maybe more so.

"We've made a beginning here at Sun Lake tonight. We've cut the big knot, the knot that kept us tied to Earth. Brownies helped us do that, and maybe they can help us lick this planet in all the ways that still remain. Maybe they can help us cure the next Joan Radcliff. Maybe they can keep us from going blind when the protective shots from Earth stop coming through.

"But maybe they can't."

"Ansie, if our children should be Brownies, we'd not only have to face it, accept it without fear—we'd have to be glad. Brownies are the children of Mars, natural human children of Mars. We don't know yet whether *we* can live here; but *we know they can.*

"They're gentle. They're honest and decent and rational. They trust each other, not because of blind loves and precedents, as we do, but because they know each other as Earth humans never can. If blind hates and precedents end life on Earth, Ansie, we can go on at Sun Lake. And we can go on that much better for knowing that even our failure, if we fail, won't be the end."

He stopped at her door and looked down at her, searching for the understanding that had to be there. If Anna failed, what other woman would comprehend?

"I'll ask you this time," she said soberly. "Tony, will you marry me?"

—CYRIL JUDD

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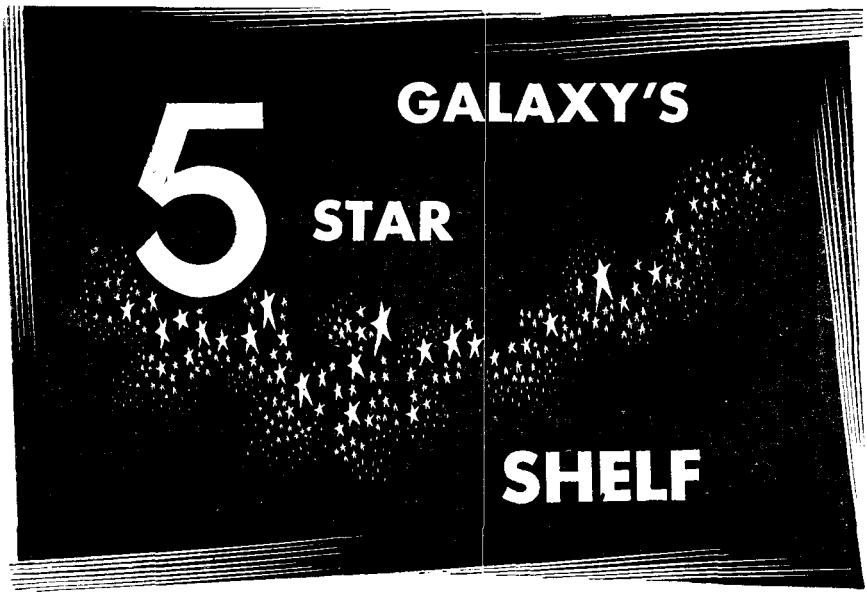

IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING? by Gerald Heard. Harper & Bros., New York, 1951. 183 pages, $2.75.

IT IS unfortunate that this book had to appear after Frank Scully's volume on flying saucers. Being a much more rational, scientific and generally persuasive job, it might have captured a reasoning audience which may not be so alienated that the very mention of the subject will make them suspect another hoax—and perhaps pass up an extremely well-reasoned piece of scientific speculation.

Gerald Heard, better known to science fiction readers as H. F. Heard, makes a case for an extraterrestrial origin of the mysterious disks, and for their being manned by a highly intelligent form of insect life (he argues for bees or beelike creatures) but in a quiet, logical way, without hysterical outbursts against military conspiracies that are keeping the "truth" from us. There will be various points at which some readers may call a mental halt and say that sometimes assumption outraces sweet reasonableness, of course. The equating of Lodge spiritualism with scientific speculation is one example. Another is when Heard posits that since no one has ever seen a flying disk land or take off, therefore none have ever landed or taken off. He also develops from no evidence

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the notion that atom bombings might, through interrelations between hard radiations from Earth and the spots on the Sun, actually cause our Cepheid to go nova.

However, you don't have to swallow the whole book; enough of it is digestible to make a good mental meal.

DREADFUL SANCTUARY, by Eric Frank Russell. Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa., 1951. 276 *pages,* $2.75.

THIS oddly double-edged novel offers a sort of reverse twist on its author's previous *Sinister Barrier,* and at the same time fits itself into the growing canon of first-trip-to-the-Moon tales.

Basically, the story has to do with the increasingly monotonous failure, by explosion, of a long series of experimental Moon rockets (all but one, a Russian model, unmanned), usually just when they are approaching the Lunar surface. The search for the causes of these catastrophes becomes the full-time occupation of John J. Armstrong, a bear of a man who has a hand in the building of the current American rocket. His detective work leads him down strange and dangerous ways—ways which in the end reveal an anti-Moon-Mars-Venus secret society on Earth that strikingly combines an inside-out version of the "we-are-property" motif of the author's earlier novel, and an uncomfortably realistic attitude toward us ordinary folks.

Half brilliant imaginative science-adventure-detective story, half bitter and biting social satire, *Dreadful Sanctuary* is one of the more adult additions to the growing shelf of reprints from the Fabulous Forties of *Astounding Science Fiction.*

THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE, by Fred Hoyle. Harper & Bros., New York, 1951. 142 *pages,* $2.50.

THIS easy popularization of the New Cosmology, as the latest British theories about the Universe are called, contains some rather astonishing new notions, which deal primarily with the refurbishing and patching-up of the older Jeans-Eddington theory about the Expanding Universe. The book's material on the Solar System and the Galaxy will be largely, though far from entirely, old stuff to the science fiction reader.

Some of the notions that come later are pretty fantastic and wonderful. They can be criticized largely on the ground that the author puts them forward with too much of an air of "This is THE Ultimate Truth; all that has gone before is Error."

The ideas are worth thinking about all the same. Most exciting of all is Hoyle's formulation of the notion of continuous creation. It

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may be said that the whole new British cosmology that Hoyle is defending is based on this at-first-sight ridiculous and anti-scientific idea. It is claimed that once every hour, more or less, approximately one atom is created out of nothing in an area of space roughly equal to that of a middle-sized skyscraper. *Out of nothing!*

Hoyle claims that while this is a new scientific *hypothesis*, it is not a "new" or "revolutionary" *assumption*. It simply replaces a previous assumption, even less likely or lovely, that "the whole of the matter in the Universe was created in one big bang at a particular time in the remote past." And it cannot be itself replaced by the idea that material never was created at all but always has been (one of the very oldest scientific assumptions) because, as Hoyle brilliantly demonstrates, were this the case there would be no hydrogen left in the Universe—and consequently no solar phoenix, no life, no *us*.

Obviously, if only for the intellectual-imaginative jag you can get out of the latter chapters of this little book, it is worth reading!

ADVENTURES IN TOMORROW, edited by Kendell Foster Crossen. Greenberg Publishers. New York, 1951. 278 *pages,* $3.50.

THIS is the first of the spring spate of science fiction anthologies, a form of literature that is becoming more of a breed than a branch—like rabbits or hamsters. This one, unfortunately, shows signs of inbreeding.

The fifteen stories are divided into four sections.

Section One: "Atomic Age." Four stories, in three of which humanity is practically wiped out, and in the fourth it certainly is on the way toward extinction—thus leaving no one to go ahead and perform the derring-do described in the rest of the book. Incidentally, Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Portable Phonograph*, the fourth story mentioned, is surely one of the masterpieces of mood science fiction; a great story. Compare it with Ray Bradbury's *There Will Come Soft Rains*, chosen from *The Martian Chronicles*: equally splendid, but diametrically opposite in method . . . The other two stories in the atomic section are by Ward Moore and Forrest Ackerman.

Section Two: "Galactic Age." Van Vogt's second-rate *Automaton*; the editor's old-type interstellar tale of imperialists-versus-downtrodden called *Restricted Clientele*, with the daring Liberal who rescues man from the slavery imposed by the Mean Old Exploiters; C. L. Moore's old (1933) and ghoulish-squirmy-cum-raw-sexy *Shambleau*—historically interesting but certainly something Mrs. Kuttner cannot be too proud of today; and Isaac Asimov's somewhat embarrassing *Christmas*

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on Ganymede (1942) which was funny only in intent.

Section Three: "Stellar Age," up to 10,000 A.D. Ted Sturgeon's well-done but minor *Memory*, very much a gadget story of a sort I did not know T. S. ever wrote; Sam Merwin's *Exiled from Earth*, dug from his earliest literary strata; Leigh Brackett's *Retreat to the Stars*, one of those Adam and Eve re-creations that I find unconvincing whenever they turn up; and Henry Kutner's funny but drastically unimportant and non-science fiction *Voice of the Lobster.*

Section Four: "Delphic Age" (whatever that is). Up to 1,000,000 years in the future. A Robert Arthur item called *Evolution's End*, which read that way; Tony Boucher's *Transfer Point* from GALAXY last fall—a darn nice time story which actually has little business in a section of the distant future (except that it does describe one sort of world's end); and Bruce Elliott's silly and thoroughly unconvincing *The Devil Was Sick.*

Of this collection only the Bradbury, Clark, Van Vogt, Sturgeon and Boucher (and possibly the C. L. Moore) are really worthy of preservation, on my scale of values. Not, in my opinion, enough to rate the price of three pounds of sirloin.

MEN OF OTHER PLANETS, by Kenneth Heuer. Pellegrini & Cudahy, New York, 1951. 165 *pages,* $3.00.

"WE KNOW so little about the planets, having never visited them, that a wonderful variety of things is possible."

This is the essence of the philosophy, the science—and the "literary style"—of this curious volume by a lecturer at the Hayden Planetarium in New York.

It is too bad that so much useful though elementary information is presented in so awkward a style and with such disregard for the elementary rules of scientific evidence.

Many science fiction addicts, including myself, are constantly shocked by the narrow-mindedness of the conventional astro-physicist or biologist, neither of whom can imagine any other form of life than one based on the carbon-water cycle. Heuer had here a really fine opportunity to map out the prospects for life of other possible sorts, based on certain elementary facts from chemistry and physics. Instead, he has largely ignored this hard but honest route, and has, with the aid of his fantastic analogies, described life-types on other worlds as visualized by his own somewhat jejune imagination, as day-dreamed by pre-scientific philosophers and astrologers, or by early scientific "astronomers."

The result is a book which gives us practically nothing that is soundly based on scientific guesswork, and a great deal that is plain nonsense.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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PEN PAL

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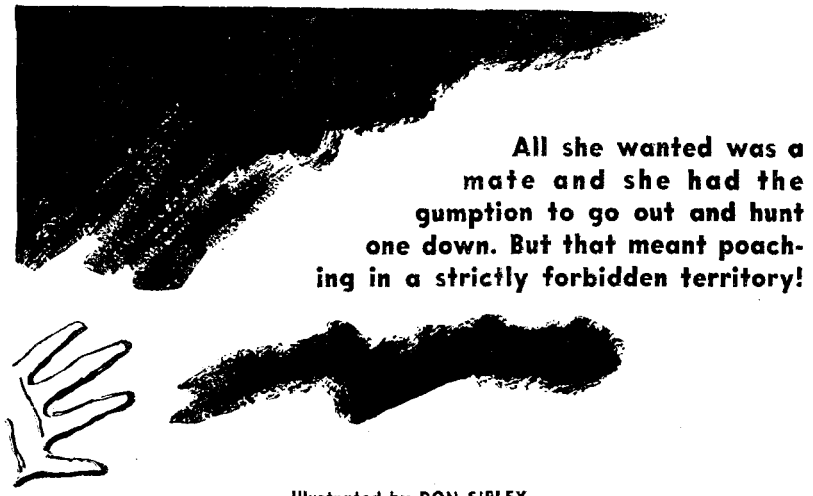

All she wanted was a mate and she had the gumption to go out and hunt one down. But that meant poaching in a strictly forbidden territory!

Illustrated by DON SIBLEY

By MILTON LESSER

THE best that could be said for Matilda Penshaws was that she was something of a paradox. She was thirty-three years old, certainly not aged when you consider the fact that the female life expectancy is now up in the sixties, but the lines were beginning to etch their permanent paths across her face and now she needed certain remedial undergarments at which she would have scoffed ten or even five years ago. Matilda was also looking for a husband.

This, in itself, was not unusual—but Matilda was so completely wrapped up in the romantic fallacy of her day that she sought a prince charming, a faithful Don Juan, a man who had been everywhere and tasted of every worldly pleasure and who now wanted to sit on a porch and talk about it all to Matilda.

The fact that in all probability such a man did not exist disturbed Matilda not in the least. She had been known to say that there are over a billion men in the world, a goodly percentage of whom are eligible bachelors, and that the right one would come along simply because she had been waiting for him.

Matilda, you see, had patience.

She also had a fetish. Matilda had received her A.B. from exclusive Ursula Johns College and Radcliff had yielded her Masters degree, yet Matilda was an avid follower of the pen pal columns. She would read them carefully and then read them again, looking for the masculine names which, through a system known only to Matilda, had

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an affinity to her own. To the gentlemen upon whom these names were affixed, Matilda would write, and she often told her mother, the widow Penshaws, that it was in this way she would find her husband. The widow Penshaws impatiently told her to go out and get dates.

THAT particular night, Matilda pulled her battered old sedan into the garage and walked up the walk to the porch. The widow Penshaws was rocking on the glider and Matilda said hello.

The first thing the widow Penshaws did was to take Matilda's left hand in her own and examine the next-to-the-last finger.

"I thought so," she said. "I knew this was coming when I saw that look in your eye at dinner. Where is Herman's engagement ring?"

Matilda smiled. "It wouldn't have worked out, Ma. He was too darned stuffy. I gave him his ring and said thanks anyway and he smiled politely and said he wished I had told him sooner because his fifteenth college reunion was this weekend and he had already turned down the invitation."

The widow Penshaws nodded regretfully. "That was thoughtful of Herman to hide his feelings."

"Hogwash!" said her daughter. "He has no true feelings. He's sorry that he had to miss his college reunion. That's all he has to hide. A stuffy Victorian prude and even less of a man than the others."

"But, Matilda, that's your fifth broken engagement in three years. It ain't that you ain't popular, but you just don't want to cooperate. You don't *fall* in love, Matilda—no one does. Love osmoses into you slowly, without you even knowing, and it keeps growing all the time."

Matilda admired her mother's use of the word osmosis, but she found nothing which was not objectionable about being unaware of the impact of love. She said good-night and went upstairs, climbed out of her light summer dress and took a cold shower.

She began to hum to herself. She had not yet seen the pen pal section of the current *Literary Review,* and because the subject matter of that magazine was somewhat highbrow and cosmopolitan, she could expect a gratifying selection of pen pals.

She shut off the shower, brushed her teeth, gargled, patted herself dry with a towel, and jumped into bed, careful to lock the door of her bedroom. She dared not let the widow Penshaws know that she slept in the nude; the widow Penshaws would object to a girl sleeping in the nude, even if the nearest neighbor was three hundred yards away.

Matilda switched her bed lamp on and dabbed some citrinella on each ear lobe and a little droplet on her chin (how she hated insects!). Then she propped up her pillows—two pillows partially stopped her post-nasal drip; and took the latest

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issue of the *Literary Review* off the night table.

She flipped through the pages and came to personals. Someone in Nebraska wanted to trade match books; someone in New York needed a midwestern pen pal, but it was a woman; an elderly man interested in ornithology wanted a young chick correspondent interested in the same subject; a young, personable man wanted an editorial position because he thought he had something to offer the editorial world; and—

MATILDA read the next one twice. Then she held it close to the light and read it again. The *Literary Review* was one of the few magazines which printed the name of the advertiser rather than a box number, and Matilda even liked the sound of the name. But mostly, she had to admit to herself, it was the flavor of the wording. This very well could be *it*. Or, that is, *him*.

> Intelligent, somewhat egotistical male who's really been around, whose universal experience can make the average cosmopolite look like a provincial hick, is in need of several female correspondents: must be intelligent, have gumption, be capable of listening to male who has a lot to say and wants to say it. All others need not apply. Wonderful opportunity cultural experience . . . Haron Gorka, Cedar Falls, Ill.

The man was egotistical, all right; Matilda could see that. But she had never minded an egotistical man, at least not when he had something about which he had a genuine reason to be egotistical. The man sounded as though he would have reason indeed. He only wanted the best because he was the best. Like calls to like.

The name—Haron Gorka: its oddness was somehow beautiful to Matilda. Haron Gorka—the nationality could be anything. And that was it. He had no nationality for all intents and purposes; he was an international man, a figure among figures, a paragon . . .

Matilda sighed happily as she put out the light. The moon shone in through the window brightly, and at such times Matilda generally would get up, go to the cupboard, pull out a towel, take two hairpins from her powder drawer, pin the towel to the screen of her window, and hence keep the disturbing moonlight from her eyes. But this time it did not disturb her, and she would let it shine. Cedar Falls was a small town not fifty miles from her home, and she'd get there a hop, skip, and jump ahead of her competitors, simply by arriving in person instead of writing a letter.

Matilda was not yet that far gone in years or appearance. Dressed properly, she could hope to make a favorable impression in person, and she felt it was important to beat the influx of mail to Cedar Falls.

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MATILDA got out of bed at seven, tiptoed into the bathroom, showered with a merest wary trickle of water, tiptoed back into her bedroom, dressed in her very best cotton over the finest of uplifting and figure-moulding underthings, made sure her stocking seams were perfectly straight, brushed her suede shoes, admired herself in the mirror, read the ad again, wished for a moment she were a bit younger, and tiptoed downstairs.

The widow Penshaws met her at the bottom of the stairwell.

"Mother," gasped Matilda. Matilda always gasped when she saw something unexpected. "What on earth are you doing up?"

The widow Penshaws smiled somewhat toothlessly, having neglected to put in both her uppers and lowers this early in the morning. "I'm fixing breakfast, of course . . ."

Then the widow Penshaws told Matilda that she could never hope to sneak about the house without her mother knowing about it, and that even if she were going out in response to one of those foolish ads in the magazines, she would still need a good breakfast to start with like only mother could cook. Matilda moodily thanked the widow Penshaws.

DRIVING the fifty miles to Cedar Falls in a little less than an hour, Matilda hummed Mendelsohn's Wedding March all the way. It was her favorite piece of music. Once, she told herself: Matilda Penshaws, you are being premature about the whole thing. But she laughed and thought that if she was, she was, and, meanwhile, she could only get to Cedar Falls and find out.

And so she got there.

The man in the wire cage at the Cedar Falls post office was a stereotype. Matilda always liked to think in terms of stereotypes. This man was small, roundish, florid of face, with a pair of eyeglasses which hung too far down on his nose. Matilda knew he would peer over his glasses and answer questions grudgingly.

"Hello," said Matilda.

The stereotype grunted and peered at her over his glasses. Matilda asked him where she could find Haron Gorka.

"What?"

"I said, where can I find Haron Gorka?"

"Is that in the United States?"

"It's not a that; it's a he. Where can I find him? Where does he live? What's the quickest way to get there?"

The stereotype pushed up his glasses and looked at her squarely. "Now take it easy, ma'am. First place, I don't know any Haron Gorka—"

Matilda kept the alarm from creeping into her voice. She muttered an *oh* under her breath and took out the ad. This she showed

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to the stereotype, and he scratched his bald head. Then he told Matilda almost happily that he was sorry he couldn't help her. He grudgingly suggested that if it really were important, she might check with the police.

Matilda did, only they didn't know any Haron Gorka, either. It turned out that no one did: Matilda tried the general store, the fire department, the city hall, the high school, all three Cedar Falls gas stations, the livery stable, and half a dozen private dwellings at random. As far as the gentry of Cedar Falls was concerned, Haron Gorka did not exist.

Matilda felt bad, but she had no intention of returning home this early. If she could not find Haron Gorka, that was one thing; but she knew that she'd rather not return home and face the widow Penshaws, at least not for a while yet. The widow Penshaws meant well, but she liked to analyze other people's mistakes, especially Matilda's.

Accordingly, Matilda trudged wearily toward Cedar Falls' small and unimposing library. She could release some of her pent-up aggression by browsing through the dusty stacks.

This she did, but it was unrewarding. Cedar Falls had what might be called a microscopic library, and Matilda thought that if this small building were filled with microfilm rather than books, the library still would be lacking. Hence she retraced her steps and nodded to the old librarian as she passed.

THEN Matilda frowned. Twenty years from now, this could be Matilda Penshaws—complete with plain gray dress, rimless spectacles, gray hair, suspicious eyes, and a broomstick figure . . .

On the other hand—why not? Why couldn't the librarian help her? Why hadn't she thought of it before? Certainly a man as well-educated as Haron Gorka would be an avid reader, and unless he had a permanent residence here in Cedar Falls, one couldn't expect that he'd have his own library with him. This being the case, a third-rate collection of books was far better than no collection at all, and perhaps the librarian would know Mr. Haron Gorka.

Matilda cleared her throat. "Pardon me," she began. "I'm looking for—"

"Haron Gorka." The librarian nodded.

"How on earth did you know?"

"That's easy. You're the sixth young woman who came here inquiring about that man today. Six of you—five others in the morning, and now you in the afternoon. I never did trust this Mr. Gorka . . ."

Matilda jumped as if she had been struck strategically from the rear. "You know him? You know Haron Gorka?"

"Certainly. Of course I know

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him. He's our steadiest reader here at the library. Not a week goes by that he doesn't take out three, four books. Scholarly gentleman, but not without charm. If I were twenty years younger—"

Matilda thought a little flattery might be effective. "Only ten," she assured the librarian. "Ten years would be more than sufficient, I'm sure."

"Are you? Well. Well, well." The librarian did something with the back of her hair, but it looked the same as before. "Maybe you're right. Maybe you're right at that." Then she sighed. "But I guess a miss is as good as a mile."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean anyone would like to correspond with Haron Gorka. Or to know him well. To be considered his friend. Haron Gorka . . ."

The librarian seemed about to soar off into the air someplace, and if five women had been here first, Matilda was now definitely in a hurry.

"Um, where can I find Mr. Gorka?"

"I'm not supposed to do this, you know. We're not permitted to give the addresses of any of our people. Against regulations, my dear."

"What about the other five women?"

"They convinced me that I ought to give them his address."

Matilda reached into her pocketbook and withdrew a five dollar bill. "Was this the way?" she demanded. Matilda was not very good at this sort of thing.

The librarian shook her head.

Matilda nodded shrewdly and added a twin brother to the bill in her hand. "Then is this better?"

"That's worse. I wouldn't take your money—"

"Sorry. What then?"

"If I can't enjoy an association with Haron Gorka directly, I still could get the vicarious pleasure of your contact with him. Report to me faithfully and you'll get his address. That's what the other five will do, and with half a dozen of you, I'll get an overall picture. Each one of you will tell me about Haron Gorka, sparing no details. You each have a distinct personality, of course, and it will color each picture considerably. But with six of you reporting, I should receive my share of vicarious enjoyment. Is it —ah—a deal?"

Matilda assured her that it was, and, breathlessly, she wrote down the address. She thanked the librarian and then she went out to her car, whistling to herself.

HARON GORKA lived in what could have been an agrarian estate, except that the land no longer was being tilled. The house itself had fallen to ruin. This surprised Matilda, but she did not let it keep her spirits in check. Haron Gorka, the man, was what counted, and the librarian's account of him certainly had been glowing enough.

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Perhaps he was too busy with his cultural pursuits to pay any real attention to his dwelling. That was it, of course: the conspicuous show of wealth or personal industry meant nothing at all to Haron Gorka. Matilda liked him all the more for it.

There were five cars parked in the long driveway, and now Matilda's made the sixth. In spite of herself, she smiled. She had not been the only one with the idea to visit Haron Gorka in person. With half a dozen of them there, the laggards who resorted to posting letters would be left far behind. Matilda congratulated herself for what she thought had been her ingenuity, and which now turned out to be something which she had in common with five other women. You live and learn, thought Matilda. And then, quite annoyedly, she berated herself for not having been the first. Perhaps the other five all were satisfactory; perhaps she wouldn't be needed; perhaps she was too late . . .

AS it turned out, she wasn't. Not only that, she was welcomed with open arms. Not by Haron Gorka; that she really might have liked. Instead, someone she could only regard as a menial met her, and when he asked had she come in response to the advertisement, she nodded eagerly. He told her that was fine and he ushered her straight into a room which evidently was to be her living quarters. It contained a small undersized bed, a table, and a chair, and, near a little slot in the wall, there was a button.

"You want any food or drink," the servant told her, "and you just press that button. The results will surprise you."

"What about Mr. Gorka?"

"When he wants you, he will send for you. Meanwhile, make yourself to home, lady, and I will tell him you are here."

A little doubtful now, Matilda thanked him and watched him leave. He closed the door softly behind his retreating feet, but Matilda's ears had not missed the ominous click. She ran to the door and tried to open it, but it would not budge. It was locked—from the outside.

It must be said to Matilda's favor that she sobbed only once. After that she realized that what is done is done and here, past thirty, she wasn't going to be girlishly timid about it. Besides, it was not her fault if, in his unconcern, Haron Gorka had unwittingly hired a neurotic servant.

For a time Matilda paced back and forth in her room, and of what was going on outside she could hear nothing. In that case, she would pretend that there was nothing outside the little room, and presently she lay down on the bed to take a nap. This didn't last long, however: she had a nightmare in which Haron Gorka appeared as a giant

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with two heads, but, upon awaking with a start, she immediately ascribed that to her overwrought nerves.

At that point she remembered what the servant had said about food and she thought at once of the supreme justice she could do to a juicy beefsteak. Well, maybe they didn't have a beefsteak. In that case, she would take what they had, and, accordingly, she walked to the little slot in the wall and pressed the button.

She heard the whir of machinery. A moment later there was a soft sliding sound. Through the slot first came a delicious aroma, followed almost instantly by a tray. On the tray were a bowl of turtle soup, mashed potatoes, green peas, bread, a strange cocktail, root-beer, a parfait—and a thick tenderloin sizzling in hot butter sauce.

Matilda gasped once and felt about to gasp again—but by then her salivary glands were working overtime, and she ate her meal. The fact that it was precisely what she would have wanted could, of course, be attributed to coincidence, and the further fact that everything was extremely palatable made her forget all about Haron Gorka's neurotic servant.

When she finished her meal a pleasant lethargy possessed her, and in a little while Matilda was asleep again. This time she did not dream at all. It was a deep sleep and a restful one, and when she awoke it was with the wonderful feeling that everything was all right.

THE feeling did not last long. Standing over her was Haron Gorka's servant, and he said, "Mr. Gorka will see you now."

"Now?"

"Now. That's what you're here for, isn't it?"

He had a point there, but Matilda hardly even had time to fix her hair. She told the servant so.

"Miss," he replied, "I assure you it will not matter in the least to Haron Gorka. You are here and he is ready to see you and that is all that matters."

"You sure?" Matilda wanted to take no chances.

"Yes. Come."

She followed him out of the little room and across what should have been a spacious dining area, except that everything seemed covered with dust. Of the other women Matilda could see nothing, and she suddenly realized that each of them probably had a cubicle of a room like her own, and that each in her turn had already had her first visit with Haron Gorka. Well, then, she must see to it that she impressed him better than did all the rest, and, later, when she returned to tell the old librarian of her adventures, she could perhaps draw her out and compare notes.

She would not admit even to herself that she was disappointed with Haron Gorka. It was not that he

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was homely and unimpressive; it was just that he was so *ordinary*-looking. She almost would have preferred the monster of her dreams.

HE wore a white linen suit and he had mousy hair, drab eyes, an almost-Roman nose, a petulant mouth with the slight arch of the egotist at each corner.

He said, "Greetings. You have come—"

"In response to your ad. How do you do, Mr. Gorka?"

She hoped she wasn't being too formal. But, then, there was no sense in assuming that he would like informality. She could only wait and see and adjust her own actions to suit him. Meanwhile, it would be best to keep on the middle of the road.

"I am fine. Are you ready?"

"Ready?"

"Certainly. You came in response to my ad. You want to hear me talk, do you not?"

"I—do." Matilda had had visions of her prince charming sitting back and relaxing with her, telling her of the many things he had done and seen. But first she certainly would have liked to get to *know* the man. Well, Haron Gorka obviously had more experience along these lines than she did. He waited, however, as if wondering what to say, and Matilda, accustomed to social chatter, gave him a gambit.

"I must admit I was surprised when I got exactly what I wanted for dinner," she told him brightly.

"Eh? What say? Oh, yes, naturally. A combination of telepathy and teleportation. The synthetic cookery is attuned to your mind when you press the buzzer, and the strength of your psychic impulses determines how closely the meal will adjust to your desires. The fact that the adjustment here was near perfect is commendable. It means either that you have a high psi-quotient, or that you were very hungry."

"Yes," said Matilda vaguely. Perhaps it might be better, after all, if Haron Gorka were to talk to her as he saw fit.

"Ready?"

"Uh—ready."

"Well?"

"Well, what, Mr. Gorka?"

"What would you like me to talk about?"

"Oh, anything."

"Please. As the ad read, my universal experience—is universal. Literally. You'll have to be more specific."

"Well, why don't you tell me about some of your far travels? Unfortunately, while I've done a lot of reading, I haven't been to all the places I would have liked—"

"Good enough. You know, of course, how frigid Deneb VII is?"

Matilda said, "Beg pardon?"

"Well, there was the time our crew—before I had retired, of

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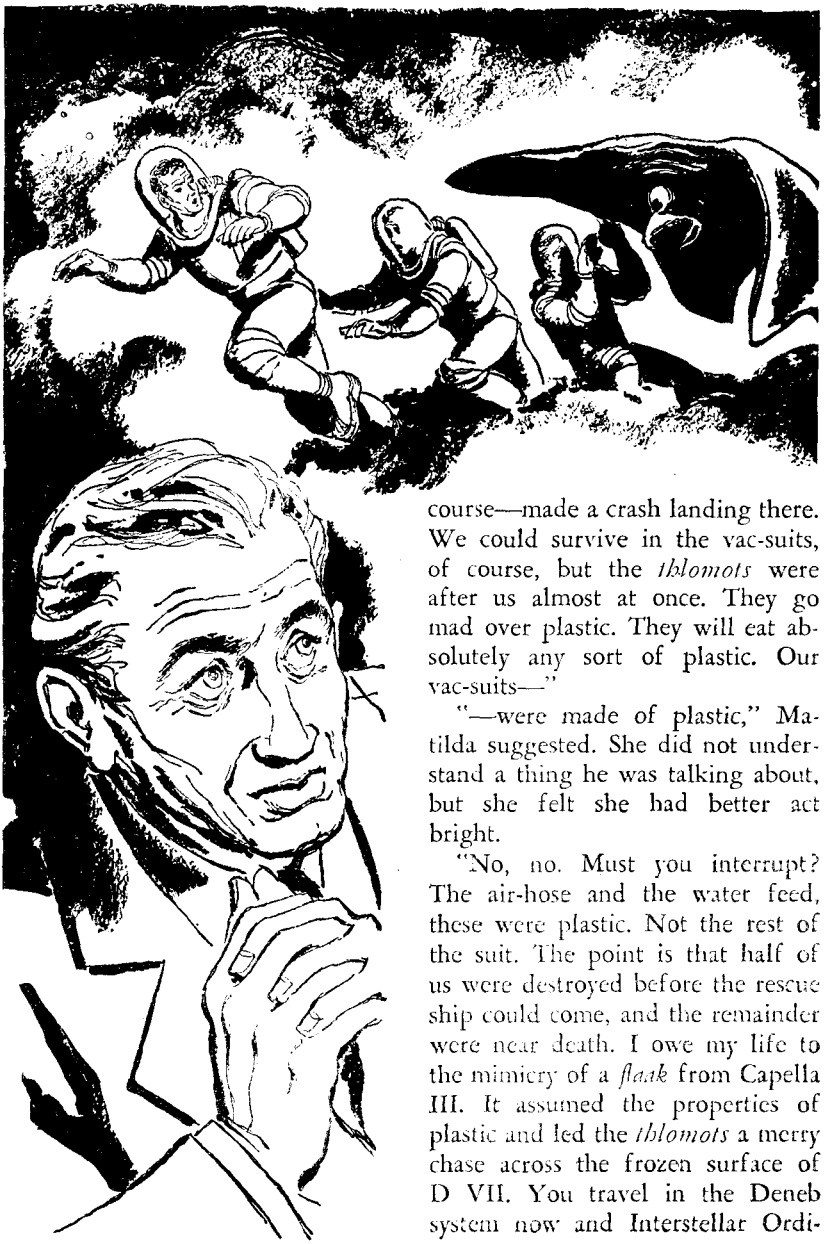

course—made a crash landing there. We could survive in the vac-suits, of course, but the *thlomots* were after us almost at once. They go mad over plastic. They will eat absolutely any sort of plastic. Our vac-suits—"

"—were made of plastic," Matilda suggested. She did not understand a thing he was talking about, but she felt she had better act bright.

"No, no. Must you interrupt? The air-hose and the water feed, these were plastic. Not the rest of the suit. The point is that half of us were destroyed before the rescue ship could come, and the remainder were near death. I owe my life to the mimicry of a *flask* from Capella III. It assumed the properties of plastic and led the *thlomots* a merry chase across the frozen surface of D VII. You travel in the Deneb system now and Interstellar Ordi-

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nance makes it mandatory to carry *flaaks* with you. Excellent idea, really excellent."

ALMOST at once, Matilda's educational background should have told her that Haron Gorka was mouthing gibberish. But on the other hand she *wanted* to believe in him and the result was that it took until now for her to realize it.

"Stop making fun of me," she said.

"So, naturally, you'll see *flaaks* all over that system—"

"Stop!"

"What's that? Making fun of you?" Haron Gorka's voice had been so eager as he spoke, high-pitched, almost like a child's, and now he seemed disappointed. He smiled, but it was a sad smile, a smile of resignation, and he said, "Very well. I'm wrong again. You are the sixth, and you're no better than the other five. Perhaps you are even more outspoken. When you see my wife, tell her to come back. Again she is right and I am wrong . . ."

Haron Gorka turned his back.

Matilda could do nothing but leave the room, walk back through the house, go outside and get into her car. She noticed not without surprise that the other five cars were now gone. She was the last of Haron Gorka's guests to depart.

As she shifted into reverse and pulled out of the driveway, she saw the servant leaving, too. Far down the road, he was walking slowly. Then Haron Gorka had severed that relationship, too, and now he was all alone.

As she drove back to town, the disappointment melted slowly away. There were, of course, two alternatives. Either Haron Gorka was an eccentric who enjoyed this sort of

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outlandish tomfoolery, or else he was plainly insane. She could still picture him ranting on aimlessly to no one in particular about places which had no existence outside of his mind, his voice high-pitched and eager.

IT WAS not until she had passed the small library building that she remembered what she had promised the librarian. In her own way, the aging woman would be as disappointed as Matilda, but a promise was a promise, and Matilda turned the car in a wide U-turn and parked it outside the library.

The woman sat at her desk as Matilda had remembered her, gray, broom-stick figure, rigid. But now when she saw Matilda she perked up visibly.

"Hello, my dear," she said.

"Hi."

"You're back a bit sooner than I expected. But, then, the other five have returned, too, and I imagine your story will be similar."

"I don't know what they told you," Matilda said. "But this is what happened to me."

She quickly then related everything which had happened, completely and in detail. She did this first because it was a promise, and second because she knew it would make her feel better.

"So," she finished, "Haron Gorka is either extremely eccentric or insane. I'm sorry."

"He's neither," the librarian contradicted. "Perhaps he is slightly eccentric by your standards, but really, my dear, he is neither."

"What do you mean?"

"Did he leave a message for his wife?"

"Why, yes. Yes, he did. But how did you know? Oh, I suppose he told the five."

"No. He didn't. But you were the last and I thought he would give you a message for his wife—"

Matilda didn't understand. She didn't understand at all, but she told the little librarian what the message was. "He wanted her to return," she said.

The librarian nodded, a happy smile on her lips. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you something."

"What's that?"

"I am Mrs. Gorka."

The librarian stood up and came around the desk. She opened a drawer and took out her hat and perched it jauntily atop her gray hair. "You see, my dear, Haron expects too much. He expects entirely too much."

Matilda did not say a word. One madman a day would be quite enough for anybody, but here she found herself confronted with two.

"We've been tripping for centuries, visiting every habitable star system from our home near Canopus. But Haron is too demanding. He says I am a finicky traveler, that he could do much better alone, the accommodations have to be just

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right for me, and so forth. When he loses his temper, he tries to convince me that any number of females of the particular planet would be more than thrilled if they were given the opportunity just to listen to him.

"But he's wrong. It's a hard life for a woman. Someday—five thousand, ten thousand years from now—I will convince him. And then we will settle down on Canopus XIV and cultivate *torgas*. That would be so nice—"

"I'm sure."

"Well, if Haron wants me back, then I have to go. Have a care, my dear. If you marry, choose a homebody. I've had the experience and you've seen my Haron for yourself."

And then the woman was gone. Numbly, Matilda walked to the doorway and watched her angular figure disappear down the road. Of all the crazy things. . . .

Deneb and Capella and Canopus, these were stars. Add a number and you might have a planet revolving about each star. Of all the insane—

They were mad, all right, and now Matilda wondered if, actually, they were husband and wife. It could readily be; maybe the madness was catching. Maybe if you thought too much about such things, such travels, you could get that way. Of course, Herman represented the other extreme, and Herman was even worse in his own way—but hereafter Matilda would seek the happy medium.

And, above all else, she had had enough of her pen pal columns. They were, she realized, for kids.

SHE ate dinner in Cedar Falls and then she went out to her car again, preparing for the journey back home. The sun had set and it was a clear night, and overhead the great broad sweep of the Milky Way was a pale rainbow bridge in the sky.

Matilda paused. Off in the distance there was a glow on the horizon, and that was the direction of Haron Gorka's place.

The glow increased; soon it was a bright red pulse pounding on the horizon. It flickered. It flickered again, and finally it was gone.

The stars were white and brilliant in the clear country air. That was why Matilda liked the country better than the city, particularly on a clear summer night when you could see the span of the Milky Way.

But abruptly the stars and the Milky Way were paled by the brightest shooting star Matilda had ever seen. It flashed suddenly and it remained in view for a full second, searing a bright orange path across the night sky.

Matilda gasped and ran into her car. She started the gears and pressed the accelerator to the floor, keeping it there all the way home.

It was the first time she had ever seen a shooting star going *up*.

—MILTON LESSER

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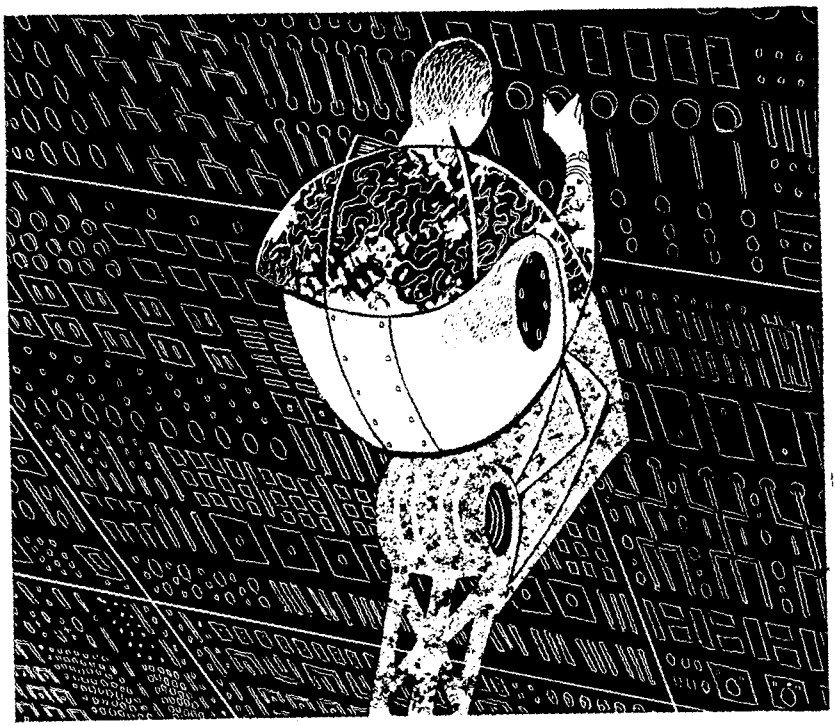
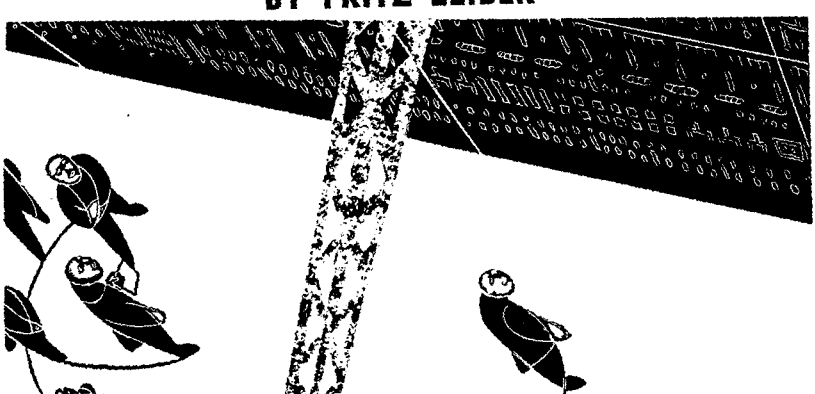


Appointment in Tomorrow

BY FRITZ LEIBER



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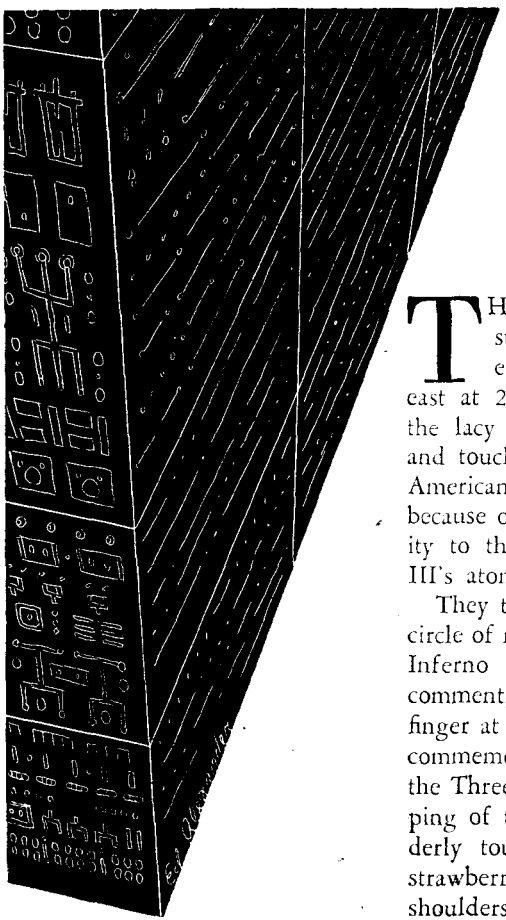
Is it possible to have a world without moral values? Or does lack of morality become a moral value, also?



Illustrated by ED ALEXANDER

THE first angry rays of the sun—which, startlingly enough, still rose in the east at 24 hour intervals—pierced the lacy tops of Atlantic combers and touched thousands of sleeping Americans with unconscious fear, because of their unpleasant similarity to the rays from World War III's atomic bombs.

They turned to blood the witch-circle of rusty steel skeletons around Inferno in Manhattan. Without comment, they pointed a cosmic finger at the tarnished brass plaque commemorating the martyrdom of the Three Physicists after the dropping of the Hell Bomb. They tenderly touched the rosy skin and strawberry bruises on the naked shoulders of a girl sleeping off a drunk on the furry and radiantly heated floor of a nearby roof garden. They struck green magic from

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the glassy blot that was Old Washington. Twelve hours before, they had revealed things as eerily beautiful, and as ravaged, in Asia and Russia. They pinked the white walls of the Colonial dwelling of Morton Opperly near the Institute for Advanced Studies; upstairs they slanted impartially across the Pharoahlike and open-eyed face of the elderly physicist and the ugly, sleep-surly one of young Willard Farquar in the next room. And in nearby New Washington they made of the spire of the Thinkers' Foundation a blue and optimistic glory that outshone White House, Jr.

It was America approaching the end of the Twentieth Century. America of juke-box burlesque and your local radiation hospital. America of the mask-fad for women and Mystic Christianity. America of the off-the-bosom dress and the New Blue Laws. America of the Endless War and the loyalty detector. America of marvelous Maizie and the monthly rocket to Mars. America of the Thinkers and (a few remembered) the Institute. "Knock on titanium," "Whadya do for blackouts," "Please, lover, don't think when I'm around" America, as combat-shocked and crippled as the rest of the bomb-shattered planet.

Not one impudent photon of the sunlight penetrated the triple-paned, polarizing windows of Jorj Helmuth's bedroom in the Thinker's Foundation, yet the clock in his brain awakened him to the minute, or almost. Switching off the Educational Sandman in the midst of the phrase, ". . . applying tensor calculus to the nucleus," he took a deep, even breath and cast his mind to the limits of the world and his knowledge. It was a somewhat shadowy vision, but, he noted with impartial approval, definitely less shadowy than yesterday morning.

Employing a rapid mental scanning technique, he next cleared his memory chains of false associations, including those acquired while asleep. These chores completed, he held his finger on a bedside button, which rotated the polarizing window panes until the room slowly filled with a muted daylight. Then, still flat on his back, he turned his head until he could look at the remarkably beautiful blonde girl asleep beside him.

REMEMBERING last night, he felt a pang of exasperation, which he instantly quelled by taking his mind to a higher and dispassionate level from which he could look down on the girl and even himself as quaint, clumsy animals. Still, he grumbled silently, Caddy might have had enough consideration to clear out before he awoke. He wondered if he shouldn't have used his hypnotic control of the girl to smooth their relationship last night, and for a moment the word that would send her into deep trance trembled on the tip of

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his tongue. But no, that special power of his over her was reserved for far more important purposes.

Pumping dynamic tension into his 20-year-old muscles and confidence into his 60-year-old mind, the 40-year-old Thinker rose from bed. No covers had to be thrown off; the nuclear heating unit made them unnecessary. He stepped into his clothing—the severe tunic, tights and sockassins of the modern business man. Next he glanced at the message tape beside his phone, washed down with ginger ale a vita-amino-enzyme tablet, and walked to the window. There, gazing along the rows of newly planted mutant oaks lining Decontamination Avenue, his smooth face broke into a smile.

It had come to him, the next big move in the intricate game making up his life—and mankind's. Come to him during sleep, as so many of his best decisions did, because he regularly employed the time-saving technique of somno-thought, which could function at the same time as somno-learning.

He set his who?-where? robot for "Rocket Physicist" and "Genius Class." While it worked, he dictated to his steno-robot the following brief message:

Dear Fellow Scientist:

A project is contemplated that will have a crucial bearing on man's future in deep space. Ample non-military Government funds are available. There was a time when professional men scoffed at the Thinkers. Then there was a time when the Thinkers perforce neglected the professional men. Now both times are past. May they never return! I would like to consult you this afternoon, three o'clock sharp, Thinkers' Foundation I.

Jorj Helmuth

Meanwhile the who?-where? had tossed out a dozen cards. He glanced through them, hesitated at the name "Willard Farquar," looked at the sleeping girl, then quickly tossed them all into the addresso-robot and plugged in the steno-robot.

The buzz-light blinked green and he switched the phone to audio.

"The President is waiting to see Maizie, sir," a clear feminine voice announced. "He has the general staff with him."

"Martian peace to him," Jorj Helmuth said. "Tell him I'll be down in a few minutes."

HUGE as a primitive nuclear reactor, the great electronic brain loomed above the knot of hush-voiced men. It almost filled a two-story room in the Thinkers' Foundation. Its front was an orderly expanse of controls, indicators, telltales, and terminals, the upper ones reached by a chair on a boom.

Although, as far as anyone knew, it could sense only the information and questions fed into it on a tape, the human visitors could not resist the impulse to talk in whispers and glance uneasily at the great cryptic cube. After all, it had lately taken to moving some of its own controls —the permissible ones—and could

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doubtless improvise a hearing apparatus if it wanted to.

For this was the thinking machine beside which the Marks and Eniacs and Maniacs and Maddidas and Minervas and Mimirs were less than Morons. This was the machine with a million times as many synapses as the human brain, the machine that remembered by cutting delicate notches in the rims of molecules (instead of kindergarten paper-punching or the Coney Island shimmying of columns of mercury). This was the machine that had given instructions on building the last three-quarters of itself. This was the goal, perhaps, toward which fallible human reasoning and biased human judgment and feeble human ambition had evolved.

This was the machine that really thought—a million-plus!

This was the machine that the timid cyberneticists and stuffy professional scientists had said could not be built. Yet this was the machine that the Thinkers, with characteristic Yankee push, *had* built. And nicknamed, with characteristic Yankee irreverence and girl-fondness, "Maizie."

Gazing up at it, the President of the United States felt a chord plucked within him that hadn't been sounded for decades, the dark and shivery organ chord of his Baptist childhood. Here, in a strange sense, although his reason rejected it, he felt he stood face to face with the living God: infinitely stern with the sternness of reality, yet infinitely just. No tiniest error or wilful misstep could ever escape the scrutiny of this vast mentality. He shivered.

THE grizzled general—there was also one who was gray—was thinking that this was a very odd link in the chain of command. Some shadowy and usually well-controlled memories from World War II faintly stirred his ire. Here he was giving orders to a being immeasurably more intelligent than himself. And always orders of the "Tell me how to kill that man" rather than the "Kill that man" sort. The distinction bothered him obscurely. It relieved him to know that Maizie had built-in controls which made her always the servant of humanity, or of humanity's right-minded leaders—even the Thinkers weren't certain which.

The gray general was thinking uneasily, and, like the President, at a more turbid level, of the resemblance between Papal infallibility and the dictates of the machine. Suddenly his bony wrists began to tremble. He asked himself: Was this the Second Coming? Mightn't an incarnation be in metal rather than flesh?

The austere Secretary of State was remembering what he'd taken such pains to make everyone forget: his youthful flirtation at Lake Success with Buddhism. Sitting before his *guru,* his teacher, feeling

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the Occidental's awe at the wisdom of the East, or its pretense, he had felt a little like this.

The burly Secretary of Space, who had come up through United Rockets, was thanking his stars that at any rate the professional scientists weren't responsible for this job. Like the grizzled general, he'd always felt suspicious of men who kept telling you how to do things, rather than doing them themselves. In World War III he'd had his fill of the professional physicists, with their eternal taint of a misty sort of radicalism and free-thinking. The Thinkers were better—more disciplined, more human. They'd called their brain-machine Maizie, which helped take the curse off her. Somewhat.

THE President's Secretary, a paunchy veteran of party caucuses, was also glad that it was the Thinkers who had created the machine, though he trembled at the power that it gave them over the Administration. Still, you could do business with the Thinkers. And nobody (not even the Thinkers) could do business (that sort of business) with Maizie!

Before that great square face with its thousands of tiny metal features, only Jorj Helmuth seemed at ease, busily entering on the tape the complex Questions of the Day that the high officials had handed him: logistics for the Endless War in Pakistan, optimum size for next year's sugar-corn crop, current thought trends in average Soviet minds—profound questions, yet many of them phrased with surprising simplicity. For figures, technical jargon, and layman's language were alike to Maizie; there was no need to translate into mathematical shorthand, as with the lesser brain-machines.

The click of the taper went on until the Secretary of State had twice nervously fired a cigaret with his ultrasonic lighter and twice quickly put it away. No one spoke.

Jorj looked up at the Secretary of Space. "Section Five, Question Four—whom would that come from?"

The burly man frowned. "That would be the physics boys, Opperly's group. Is anything wrong?"

Jorj did not answer. A bit later he quit taping and began to adjust controls, going up on the boom-chair to reach some of them. Eventually he came down and touched a few more, then stood waiting.

From the great cube came a profound, steady purring. Involuntarily the six officials backed off a bit. Somehow it was impossible for a man to get used to the sound of Maizie starting to think.

JORJ turned, smiling. "And now, gentlemen, while we wait for Maizie to cerebrate, there should be just enough time for us to watch the takeoff of the Mars rocket."

He switched on a giant televi-

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sion screen. The others made a quarter turn, and there before them glowed the rich ochres and blues of a New Mexico sunrise and, in the middle distance, a silvery mighty spindle.

Like the generals, the Secretary of Space suppressed a scowl. Here was something that ought to be spang in the center of his official territory, and the Thinkers had locked him completely out of it. That rocket there—just an ordinary Earth satellite vehicle commandeered from the Army, but equipped by the Thinkers with Maizie-designed nuclear motors capable of the Mars journey and more. The first spaceship—and the Secretary of Space was not in on it!

Still, he told himself, Maizie had decreed it that way. And when he remembered what the Thinkers had done for him in rescuing him from breakdown with their mental science, in rescuing the whole Administration from collapse he realized he had to be satisfied. And that was without taking into consideration the amazing addition mental discoveries that the Thinkers were bringing down from Mars.

"Lord," the President said to Jorj as if voicing the Secretary's feeling, "I wish you people could bring a couple of those wise little devils back with you this trip. Be a good thing for the country."

Jorj looked at him a bit coldly. "It's quite unthinkable," he said. "The telepathic abilities of the Martians make them extremely sensitive. The conflicts of ordinary Earth minds would impinge on them psychotically, even fatally. As you know, the Thinkers were able to contact them only because of our degree of learned mental poise and errorless memory-chains. So for the present it must be our task alone to glean from the Martians their astounding mental skills. Of course, some day in the future, when we have discovered how to armor the minds of the Martians—"

"Sure, I know," the President said hastily. "Shouldn't have mentioned it, Jorj."

Conversation ceased. They waited with growing tension for the great violet flames to bloom from the base of the silvery shaft.

MEANWHILE the question tape, like a New Year's streamer tossed out a high window into the night, sped on its dark way along spinning rollers. Curling with an intricate aimlessness curiously like that of such a streamer, it tantalized the silvery fingers of a thousand relays, saucily evaded the glances of ten thousand electric eyes, impishly darted down a narrow black alleyway of memory banks, and, reaching the center of the cube, suddenly emerged into a small room where a suave fat man in shorts sat drinking beer.

He flipped the tape over to him with practiced finger, eying it as a stockbroker might have studied a

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ticker tape. He read the first question, closed his eyes and frowned for five seconds. Then with the staccato self-confidence of a hack writer, he began to tape out the answer.

For many minutes the only sounds were the rustle of the paper ribbon and the click of the taper, except for the seconds the fat man took to close his eyes, or to drink or pour beer. Once, too, he lifted a phone, asked a concise question, waited half a minute, listened to an answer, then went back to the grind.

Until he came to Section Five, Question Four. That time he did his thinking with his eyes open.

The question was: "Does Maizie stand for Maelzel?"

He sat for a while slowly scratching his thigh. His loose, persuasive lips tightened, without closing, into the shape of a snarl.

Suddenly he began to tape again.

"Maizie does not stand for Maelzel. Maizie stands for amazing, humorously given the form of a girl's name. Section Six, Answer One: The mid-term election viewcasts should be spaced as follows . . ."

But his lips didn't lose the shape of a snarl.

FIVE hundred miles above the ionosphere, the Mars rocket cut off its fuel and slumped gratefully into an orbit that would carry it effortlessly around the world at that altitude. The pilot unstrapped himself and stretched, but he didn't look out the viewport at the dried-mud disc that was Earth, cloaked in its haze of blue sky. He knew he had two maddening months ahead of him in which to do little more than that. Instead, he unstrapped Sappho.

Used to free fall from two previous experiences, and loving it, the fluffy little cat was soon bounding about the cabin in curves and gyrations that would have made her the envy of all back-alley and parlor felines on the planet below. A miracle cat in the dream world of free fall. For a long time she played with a string that the man would toss out lazily. Sometimes she caught the string on the fly, sometimes she swam for it frantically.

After a while the man grew bored with the game. He unlocked a drawer and began to study the details of the wisdom he would discover on Mars this trip—priceless spiritual insights that would be balm to war-battered mankind.

The cat carefully selected a spot three feet off the floor, curled up on the air, and went to sleep.

JORJ HELMUTH snipped the emerging answer tape into sections and handed each to the appropriate man. Most of them carefully tucked theirs away with little more than a glance, but the Secretary of Space puzzled over his.

"Who the devil would Maelzel be?" he asked.

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A remote look came into the eyes of the Secretary of State. "Edgar Allen Poe," he said frowningly, with eyes half-closed.

The grizzled general snapped his fingers. "Sure! Maelzel's Chess player. Read it when I was a kid. About an automaton that was supposed to play chess. Poe proved it had a man inside it."

The Secretary of Space frowned. "Now what's the point in a fool question like that?"

"You said it came from Opperly's group?" Jorj asked sharply.

The Secretary of Space nodded. The others looked at the two men puzzledly.

"Who would that be?" Jorj pressed. "The group, I mean."

The Secretary of Space shrugged. "Oh, the usual little bunch over at the Institute. Hindeman, Gregory, Opperly himself. Oh, yes, and young Farquar."

"Sounds like Opperly's getting senile," Jorj commented coldly. "I'd investigate."

The Secretary of Space nodded. He suddenly looked tough. "I will. Right away."

SUNLIGHT striking through French windows spotlighted a ballet of dust motes untroubled by air-conditioning. Morton Opperly's living room was well-kept but worn and quite behind the times. Instead of reading tapes there were books; instead of steno-robots, pen and ink; while in place of a four by six TV screen, a Picasso hung on the wall. Only Opperly knew that the painting was still faintly radioactive, that it had been riskily so when he'd smuggled it out of his bomb-singed apartment in New York City.

The two physicists fronted each other across a coffee table. The face of the elder was cadaverous, large-eyed, and tender—fined down by a long life of abstract thought. That of the younger was forceful, sensuous, bulky as his body, and exceptionally ugly. He looked rather like a bear.

Opperly was saying, "So when he asked who was responsible for the Maelzel question, I said I didn't remember." He smiled. "They still allow me my absent-mindedness, since it nourishes their contempt. Almost my sole remaining privilege." The smile faded. "Why do you keep on teasing the zoo animals, Willard?" he asked without rancor. "I've maintained many times that we shouldn't truckle to them by yielding to their demand that we ask Maizie questions. You and the rest have overruled me. But then to use those questions to convey veiled insults isn't reasonable. Apparently the Secretary of Space was bothered enough about this last one to pay me a 'copter call within twenty minutes of this morning's meeting at the Foundation. Why do you do it, Willard?"

The features of the other convulsed unpleasantly. "Because the

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Thinkers are charlatans who must be exposed," he rapped out. "We know their Maizie is no more than a tealeaf-reading fake. We've traced their Mars rockets and found they go nowhere. We know their Martian mental science is bunk."

"But we've already exposed the Thinkers very thoroughly," Opperly interposed quietly. "You know the good it did."

Farquar hunched his Japanese-wrestler shoulders. "Then it's got to be done until it takes."

Opperly studied the bowl of mutated flowers by the coffee pot. "I think you just want to tease the animals, for some personal reason of which you probably aren't aware."

Farquar scowled. "We're the ones in the cages."

OPPERLY continued his inspection of the flowers' bells. "All the more reason not to poke sticks through the bars at the lions and tigers strolling outside. No, Willard, I'm not counseling appeasement. But consider the age in which we live. It wants magicians." His voice grew especially tranquil. "A scientist tells people the truth. When times are good—that is, when the truth offers no threat—people don't mind. But when times are very, very bad . . ." A shadow darkened his eyes. "Well, we all know what happened to—" And he mentioned three names that had been household words in the middle of the century. They were the names on the brass plaque dedicated to the martyred three physicists.

He went on, "A magician, on the other hand, tells people what they wish were true—that perpetual motion works, that cancer can be cured by colored lights, that a psychosis is no worse than a head cold, that they'll live forever. In good times magicians are laughed at. They're a luxury of the spoiled wealthy few. But in bad times people sell their souls for magic cures, and buy perpetual motion machines to power their war rockets."

Farquar clenched his fist. "All the more reason to keep chipping away at the Thinkers. Are we supposed to beg off from a job because it's difficult and dangerous?"

Opperly shook his head. "We're to keep clear of the infection of violence. In my day, Willard, I was one of the Frightened Men. Later I was one of the Angry Men and then one of the Minds of Despair. Now I'm convinced that all my reactions were futile."

"Exactly!" Farquar agreed harshly. "You reacted. You didn't act. If you men who discovered atomic energy had only formed a secret league, if you'd only had the foresight and the guts to use your tremendous bargaining position to demand the power to shape mankind's future . . ."

"By the time you were born, Willard," Opperly interrupted dreamily, "Hitler was merely a

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name in the history books. We scientists weren't the stuff out of which cloak-and-dagger men are made. Can you imagine Oppenheimer wearing a mask or Einstein sneaking into the Old White House with a bomb in his briefcase?" He smiled. "Besides, that's not the way power is seized. New ideas aren't useful to the man bargaining for power—only established facts or lies are."

"Just the same, it would have been a good thing if you'd had a little violence in you."

"No," Opperly said.

"I've got violence in me," Farquar announced, shoving himself to his feet.

OPPERLY looked up from the flowers. "I think you have," he agreed.

"But what are we to do?" Farquar demanded. "Surrender the world to charlatans without a struggle?"

Opperly mused for a while. "I don't know what the world needs now. Everyone knows Newton as the great scientist. Few remember that he spent half his life muddling with alchemy, looking for the philosopher's stone. Which Newton did the world need then?"

"Now you are justifying the Thinkers!"

"No, I leave that to history."

"And history consists of the actions of men," Farquar concluded. "I intend to act. The Thinkers are vulnerable, their power fantastically precarious. What's it based on? A few lucky guesses. Faith-healing. Some science hocus-pocus, on the level of those juke-box burlesque acts between the strips. Dubious mental comfort given to a few nerve-torn neurotics in the Inner Cabinet—and their wives. The fact that the Thinkers' clever stage-managing won the President a doubtful election. The erroneous belief that the Soviets pulled out of Iraq and Iran because of the Thinkers' Mind Bomb threat. A brain-machine that's just a cover for Jan Tregarron's guesswork. Oh, yes, and that hogwash of 'Martian wisdom.' All of it mere bluff! A few pushes at the right times and points are all that are needed—and the Thinkers know it! I'll bet they're terrified already, and will be more so when they find that we're gunning for them. Eventually they'll be making overtures to us, turning to us for help. You wait and see."

"I am thinking again of Hitler," Opperly interposed quietly. "On his first half dozen big steps, he had nothing but bluff. His generals were against him. They knew they were in a cardboard fort. Yet he won every battle, until the last. Moreover," he pressed on, cutting Farquar short, "the power of the Thinkers isn't based on what they've got, but on what the world hasn't got—peace, honor, a good conscience . . ."

The front-door knocker clanked.

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Farquar answered it. A skinny old man with a radiation scar twisting across his temple handed him a tiny cylinder. "Radiogram for you, Willard." He grinned across the hall at Opperly. "When are you going to get a phone put in, Mr. Opperly?"

The physicist waved to him. "Next year, perhaps, Mr. Berry."

The old man snorted with good-humored incredulity and trudged off.

"What did I tell you about the Thinkers making overtures?" Farquar chortled suddenly. "It's come sooner than I expected. Look at this."

He held out the radiogram, but the older man didn't take it. Instead he asked, "Who's it from? Tregarron?"

"No, from Helmuth. There's a lot of sugar corn about man's future in deep space, but the real reason is clear. They know that they're going to have to produce an actual nuclear rocket pretty soon, and for that they'll need our help."

"An invitation?"

Farquar nodded. "For this afternoon." He noticed Opperly's anxious though distant frown. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Are you bothered about my going? Are you thinking it might be a trap—that after the Maelzel question they may figure I'm better rubbed out?"

The older man shook his head. "I'm not afraid for your life, Willard. That's yours to risk as you choose. No, I'm worried about other things they might do to you."

"What do you mean?" Farquar asked.

OPPERLY looked at him with a gentle appraisal. "You're a strong and vital man, Willard, with a strong man's prides and desires." His voice trailed off for a bit. Then, "Excuse me, Willard, but wasn't there a girl once? A Miss Arkady?"

Farquar's ungainly figure froze. He nodded curtly, face averted.

"And didn't she go off with a Thinker?"

"If girls find me ugly, that's their business," Farquar said harshly, still not looking at Opperly. "What's that got to do with this invitation?"

Opperly didn't answer the question. His eyes got more distant. Finally he said, "In my day we had it a lot easier. A scientist was an academician, cushioned by tradition."

Willard snorted. "Science had already entered the era of the police inspectors, with laboratory directors and political appointees stifling enterprise."

"Perhaps," Opperly agreed. "Still, the scientist lived the safe, restricted, highly respectable life of a university man. He wasn't exposed to the temptations of the world."

Farquar turned on him. "Are you implying that the Thinkers will somehow be able to buy me off?"

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"Not exactly."

"You think I'll be persuaded to change my aims?" Farquar demanded angrily.

Opperly shrugged his helplessness. "No, I don't think you'll change your aims."

Clouds encroaching from the west blotted the parallelogram of sunlight between the two men.

AS THE slideway whisked him gently along the corridor toward his apartment, Jorj was thinking of his spaceship. For a moment the silver-winged vision crowded everything else out of his mind.

Just think, a spaceship with sails! He smiled a bit, marveling at the paradox.

Direct atomic power. Direct utilization of the force of the flying neutrons. No more ridiculous business of using a reactor to drive a steam engine, or boil off something for a jet exhaust—processes that were as primitive and wasteful as burning gunpowder to keep yourself warm.

Chemical jets would carry his spaceship above the atmosphere. Then would come the thrilling order, "Set sail for Mars!" The vast umbrella would unfold and open out around the stern, its rear or Earthward side a gleaming expanse of radioactive ribbon perhaps only an atom thick and backed with a material that would reflect neutrons. Atoms in the ribbon would split, blasting neutrons astern at fantastic velocities. Reaction would send the spaceship hurtling forward.

In airless space, the expanse of sails would naturally not retard the ship. More radioactive ribbon, manufactured as needed in the ship itself, would feed out onto the sail as that already there became exhausted.

A spaceship with direct nuclear drive—and he, a Thinker, had conceived it completely except for the technical details! Having strengthened his mind by hard years of somno-learning, mind-casting, memory-straightening, and sensory training, he had assured himself of the executive power to control the technicians and direct their specialized abilities. Together they would build the true Mars rocket.

But that would only be a beginning. They would build the true Mind Bomb. They would build the true Selective Microbe Slayer. They would discover the true laws of ESP and the inner life. They would even—his imagination hesitated a moment, then strode boldly forward—build the true Maizie!

And then . . . then the Thinkers would be on even terms with the scientists. Rather, they'd be far ahead. No more deception.

He was so exalted by this thought that he almost let the slideway carry him past his door. He stepped inside and called, "Caddy!" He waited a moment, then walked through the apartment, but she wasn't there.

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CONFOUND the girl, he couldn't help thinking. This morning, when she should have made herself scarce, she'd sprawled about sleeping. Now, when he felt like seeing her, when her presence would have added a pleasant final touch to his glowing mood, she chose to be absent. He really should use his hypnotic control on her, he decided, and again there sprang into his mind the word—a pet form of her name—that would send her into obedient trance.

No, he told himself again, that was to be reserved for some moment of crisis or desperate danger, when he would need someone to strike suddenly and unquestioningly for himself and mankind. Caddy was merely a wilful and rather silly girl, incapable at present of understanding the tremendous tensions under which he operated. When he had time for it, he would train her up to be a fitting companion without hypnosis.

Yet the fact of her absense had a subtly disquieting effect. It shook his perfect self-confidence just a fraction. He asked himself if he'd been wise in summoning the rocket physicists without consulting Tregarron.

But this mood, too, he conquered quickly. Tregarron wasn't his boss, but just the Thinker's most clever salesman, an expert in the mumbo-jumbo so necessary for social control in this chaotic era. He himself, Jorj Helmuth, was the real leader in theoretics and all-over strategy, the mind behind the mind behind Maizie.

He stretched himself on the bed, almost instantly achieved maximum relaxation, turned on the somno-learner, and began the two hour rest he knew would be desirable before the big conference.

JAN TREGARRON had supplimented his shorts with pink coveralls, but he was still drinking beer. He emptied his glass and lifted it a lazy inch. The beautiful girl beside him refilled it without a word and went on stroking his forehead.

"Caddy," he said reflectively, without looking at her, "there's a little job I want you to do. You're the only one with the proper background. The point is: it will take you away from Jorj for some time."

"I'd welcome it," she said with decision. "I'm getting pretty sick of watching his push-ups and all his other mind and muscle stunts. And that damn somno-learner of his keeps me awake."

Tregarron smiled. "I'm afraid Thinkers make pretty sad sweethearts."

"Not all of them," she told him, returning his smile tenderly.

He chuckled. "It's about one of those rocket physicists in the list you brought me. A fellow named Willard Farquar."

Caddy didn't say anything, but she stopped stroking his forehead.

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"What's the matter?" he asked. "You knew him once, didn't you?"

"Yes," she replied and then added, with surprising feeling, "The big, ugly ape!"

"Well, he's an ape whose services we happen to need. I want you to be our contact girl with him."

She took her hands away from his forehead. "Look, Jan," she said, "I wouldn't like this job."

"I thought he was very sweet on you once."

"Yes, as he never grew tired of trying to demonstrate to me. The clumsy, overgrown, bumbling baby! The man's disgusting, Jan. His approach to a woman is a child wanting candy and enraged because Mama won't produce it on the instant. I don't mind Jorj—he's just a pipsqueak and it amuses me to see how he frustrates himself. But Willard is . . ."

". . . a bit frightening?" Tregarron finished for her.

"No!"

"Of course you're not afraid," Tregarron purred. "You're our beautiful, clever Caddy, who can do anything she wants with any man, and without whose . . ."

"Look, Jan, this is different—" she began agitatedly.

". . . and without whose services we'd have got exactly nowhere. Clever, subtle Caddy, whose most charming attainment in the ever-appreciative eyes of Papa Jan is her ability to handle every man in the neatest way imaginable and without a trace of real feeling. Kitty Kaddy, who . . ."

"Very well," she said with a sigh. "I'll do it."

"Of course you will," Jan said, drawing her hands back to his forehead. "And you'll begin right away by getting into your nicest sugar-and-cream war clothes. You and I are going to be the welcoming committee when that ape arrives this afternoon."

"But what about Jorj? He'll want to see Willard."

"That'll be taken care of," Jan assured her.

"And what about the other dozen rocket physicists Jorj asked to come?"

"Don't worry about them."

THE President looked inquiringly at his secretary across his littered desk in his homy study at White House, Jr. "So Opperly didn't have any idea how that odd question about Maizie turned up in Section Five?"

His secretary settled his paunch and shook his head. "Or claimed not to. Perhaps he's just the absent-minded prof, perhaps something else. The old feud of the physicists against the Thinkers may be getting hot again. There'll be further investigation."

The President nodded. He obviously had something uncomfortable on his mind. He said uneasily, "Do you think there's any possibility of it being true?"

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"What?" asked the secretary guardedly.

"That peculiar hint about Maizie."

The secretary said nothing.

"Mind you, I don't think there is," the President went on hurriedly, his face assuming a sorrowful scowl. "I owe a lot to the Thinkers, both as a private person and as a public figure. Lord, a man has to lean on *something* these days. But just supposing it were true—" he hesitated, as before uttering blasphemy—"that there was a man inside Maizie, what could we do?"

The secretary said stolidly, "The Thinkers won our last election. They chased the Commies out of Iran. We brought them into the Inner Cabinet. We've showered them with public funds." He paused. "We couldn't do a damn thing."

The President nodded with equal conviction, and, not very happily, summed up: "So if anyone should go up against the Thinkers—and I'm afraid I wouldn't want to see that happen, whatever's true—it would have to be a scientist."

WILLARD FARQUAR felt his weight change the steps under his feet into an escalator. He cursed under his breath, but let them carry him, a defiant hulk, up to the tall and mystic blue portals, which silently parted when he was five meters away. The escalator changed to a slideway and carried him into a softly gleaming, high-domed room rather like the antechamber of a temple.

"Martian peace to you, Willard Farquar," an invisible voice intoned. "You have entered the Thinkers' Foundation. Please remain on the slideway."

"I want to see Jorj Helmuth," Willard growled loudly.

The slideway carried him into the mouth of a corridor and paused. A dark opening dilated on the wall. "May we take your hat and coat?" a voice asked politely. After a moment the request was repeated, with the addition of, "Just pass them through."

Willard scowled, then fought his way out of his shapeless coat and passed it and his hat through in a lump. Instantly the opening contracted, imprisoning his wrists, and he felt his hands being washed on the other side of the wall.

He gave a great jerk which failed to free his hands from the snugly padded gyves. "Do not be alarmed," the voice advised him. "It is only an esthetic measure. As your hands are laved, invisible radiations are slaughtering all the germs in your body, while more delicate emanations are producing a benign rearrangement of your emotions."

The rather amateurish curses Willard was gritting between his teeth became more sulfurous. His sensations told him that a towel of some sort was being applied to

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his hands. He wondered if he would be subjected to a face-washing and even greater indignities. Then, just before his wrists were released, he felt—for a moment only, but unmistakably—the soft touch of a girl's hand.

That touch, like the mysterious sweet chink of a bell in darkness, brought him a sudden feeling of excitement, wonder.

Yet the feeling was as fleeting as that caused by a lurid advertisement, for as the slideway began to move again, carrying him past a series of depth-pictures and inscriptions celebrating the Thinkers' achievements, his mood of bitter exasperation returned doubled. This place, he told himself, was a plague spot of the disease of magic in an enfeebled and easily infected world. He reminded himself that he was not without resources—the Thinkers must fear or need him, whether because of the Maelzel question or the necessity of producing a nuclear power spaceship. He felt his determination to smash them reaffirmed.

THE slideway, having twice turned into an escalator, veered toward an opalescent door, which opened as silently as the one below. The slideway stopped at the threshold. Momentum carried him a couple of steps into the room. He stopped and looked around.

The place was a sybarite's modernistic dream. Sponge-carpeting thick as a mattress and topped with down. Hassocks and couches that looked butter-soft. A domed ceiling of deep glossy blue mimicking the night sky, with the constellations tooled in silver. A wall of niches crammed with statuettes of languorous men, women, beasts. A self-service bar with a score of golden spigots. A depth-TV-screen simulating a great crystal ball. Here and there barbaric studs of hammered gold that might have been push-buttons. A low table set for three with exquisite ware of crystal and gold. An ever-changing scent of resins and flowers.

A smiling fat man clad in pearl gray sports clothes came through one of the curtained archways. Willard recognized Jan Tregarron from his pictures, but did not at once offer to speak to him. Instead he let his gaze wander with an ostentatious contempt around the crammed walls, take in the bar and the set table with its many wine glasses, and finally return to his host.

"And where," he asked with harsh irony, "are the dancing girls?"

The fat man's eyebrows rose. "In there," he said innocently, indicating the second archway. The curtains parted.

"Oh, I *am* sorry," the fat man apologized. "There seems to be only one on duty. I hope that isn't too much at variance with your tastes."

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She stood in the archway, demure and lovely in an off-the-bosom frock of pale blue skylon edged in mutated mink. She was smiling the first smile that Willard had ever had from her lips.

"Mr. Willard Farquar," the fat man murmured, "Miss Arkady Simms."

JORJ HELMUTH turned from the conference table with its dozen empty chairs to the two mousily pretty secretaries.

"No word from the door yet, Master," one of them ventured to say.

Jorj twisted in his chair, though hardly uncomfortably, since it was a beautiful pneumatic job. His nervousness at having to face the twelve rocket physicists—a feeling which, he had to admit, had been unexpectedly great—was giving way to impatience.

"What's Willard Farquar's phone?" he asked sharply.

One of the secretaries ran through a clutch of desk tapes, then spent some seconds whispering into her throat-mike and listening to answers from the soft-speaker.

"He lives with Morton Opperly, who doesn't have one," she finally told Jorj in scandalized tones.

"Let me see the list," Jorj said. Then, after a bit, "Try Dr. Welcome's place."

This time there were results. Within a quarter of a minute he was handed a phone which he hung expertly on his shoulder.

"This is Dr. Asa Welcome," a reedy voice told him.

"This is Helmuth of the Thinkers' Foundation," Jorj said icily. "Did you get my communication?"

The reedy voice became anxious and placating. "Why, yes, Mr. Helmuth, I did. Very glad to get it too. Sounded most interesting. Very eager to come. But . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, I was just about to hop in my 'copter—my son's 'copter—when the other note came."

"What other note?"

"Why, the note calling the meeting off."

"I sent no other note!"

The other voice became acutely embarrassed. "But I considered it to be from you . . . or just about the same thing. I really think I had the right to assume that."

"How was it signed?" Jorj rapped.

"Mr. Jan Tregarron."

Jorj broke the connection. He didn't move until a low sound shattered his abstraction and he realized that one of the girls was whispering a call to the door. He handed back the phone and dismissed them. They went in a rustle of jackets and skirtlets, hesitating at the doorway but not quite daring to look back.

He sat motionless a minute longer. Then his hand crept fretfully onto the table and pushed a button. The room darkened and a

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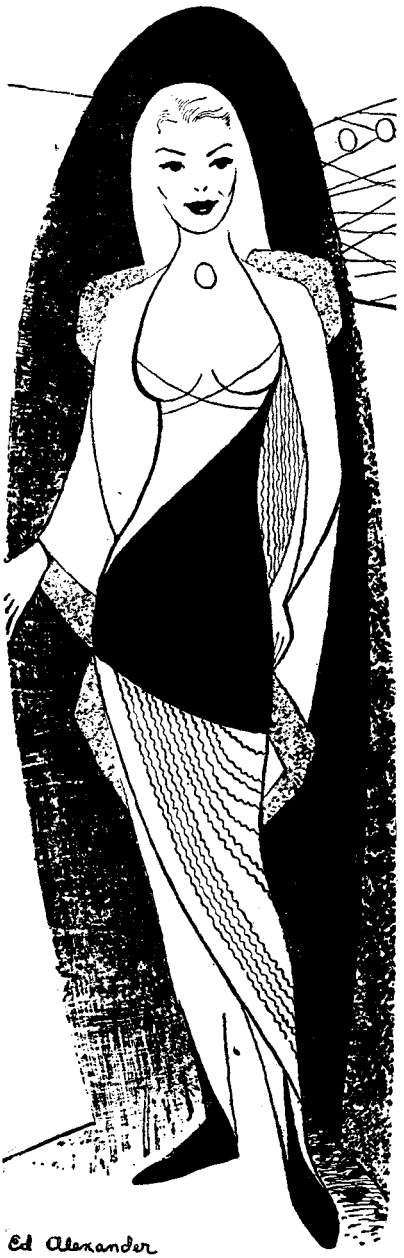
long section of wall became transparent, revealing a dozen silvery models of spaceships, beautifully executed. He quickly touched another; the models faded and the opposite wall bloomed with an animated cartoon that portrayed with charming humor and detail the designing and construction of a neutron-drive spaceship. A third button, and a depth-picture of deep star-speckled space opened behind the cartoon, showing a section of Earth's surface and in the far distance the tiny ruddy globe of Mars. Slowly a tiny rocket rose from the section of Earth and spread its silvery sails.

HE SWITCHED off the pictures, keeping the room dark. By a faint table light he dejectedly examined his organizational charts for the neutron-drive project, the long list of books he had boned up on by somno-learning, the concealed table of physical constants and all sorts of other crucial details about rocket physics—a cleverly condensed encyclopedic "pony" to help out his memory on technical points that might have arisen in his discussion with the experts.

He switched out all the lights and slumped forward, blinking his eyes and trying to swallow the lump in his throat. In the dark his memory went seeping back, back, to the day when his math teacher had told him, very superciliously, that the marvelous fantasies he loved to read



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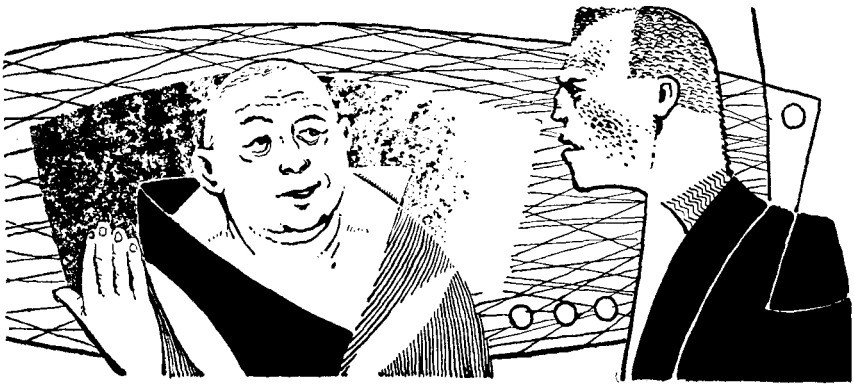

and hoarded by his bed weren't real science at all, but just a kind of lurid pretense. He had so wanted to be a scientist, and the teacher's contempt had cast a damper on his ambition.

And now that the conference was canceled, would he ever know that it wouldn't have turned out the same way today? That his somno-learning hadn't taken? That his "pony" wasn't good enough? That his ability to handle people extended only to credulous farmer Presidents and mousy girls in skirtlets? Only the test of meeting the experts would have answered those questions.

Tregarron was the one to blame! Tregarron with his sly tyrannical ways, Tregarron with his fear of losing the future to men who really understood theoretics and could handle experts. Tregarron, so used to working by deception that he couldn't see when it became a fault and a crime. Tregarron, who must now be shown the light . . . or, failing that, against whom certain steps must be taken.

For perhaps half an hour Jorj sat very still, thinking. Then he turned to the phone and, after some delay, got his party.

"What is it now, Jorj?" Caddy asked impatiently. "Please don't bother me with any of your moods, because I'm tired and my nerves are on edge."

He took a breath. When steps may have to be taken, he thought, one must hold an agent in readiness. "Caddums," he intoned hypnotically, vibrantly. "Caddums . . ."

The voice at the other end had instantly changed, become submissive, sleepy, suppliant.

"Yes, Master?"

MORTON OPPERLY looked up from the sheet of neatly penned equations at Willard Far-

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quar, who had somehow acquired a measure of poise. He neither lumbered restlessly nor grimaced. He removed his coat with a certain dignity and stood solidly before his mentor. He smiled. Granting that he was a bear, one might guess he had just been fed.

"You see?" he said. "They didn't hurt me."

"They didn't hurt you?" Opperly asked softly.

Willard slowly shook his head. His smile broadened.

Opperly put down his pen, folded his hands. "And you're as determined as ever to expose and smash the Thinkers?"

"Of course!" The menacing growl came back into the bear's voice, except that it was touched with a certain pleased luxuriousness. "Only from now on I won't be teasing the zoo animals, and I won't embarrass you by asking any more Maelzel questions. I have reached the objective at which those tactics were aimed. After this I shall bore from within."

"Bore from within," Opperly repeated, frowning. "Now where have I heard that phrase before?" His brow cleared. "Oh, yes," he said listlessly. "Do I understand that you are becoming a Thinker, Willard?"

The other gave him a faintly pitying smile and stretched himself on the couch, gazed at the ceiling. All his movements were deliberate, easy.

"Certainly. That's the only realistic way to smash them. Rise high in their councils. Out-trick all their trickeries. Organize a fifth column. Then *strike!*"

"The end justifying the means, of course," Opperly said.

"Of course. As surely as the desire to stand up justifies your disturbing the air over your head. All action in this world is nothing but means."

Opperly nodded abstractedly. "I wonder if anyone else ever became a Thinker for those same reasons. I wonder if being a Thinker doesn't simply mean that you've decided you have to use lies and tricks as your chief method."

WILLARD shrugged. "Could be." There was no longer any doubt about the pitying quality of his smile.

Opperly stood up, squaring together his papers. "So you'll be working with Helmuth?"

"Not Helmuth. Tregarron." The bear's smile became cruel. "I'm afraid that Helmuth's career as a Thinker is going to have quite a setback."

"Helmuth," Opperly mused. "Morgenschein once told me a bit about him. A man of some idealism, despite his affiliations. Best of a bad lot. Incidently, is he the one with whom . . ."

". . . Miss Arkady Simms ran off?" Willard finished without any embarrassment. "Yes, that was

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Helmuth. But that's all going to be changed now."

Opperly nodded. "Good-by, Willard," he said.

Willard quickly heaved himself up on an elbow. Opperly looked at him for about five seconds, then, without a word, walked out of the room.

THE only obvious furnishings in Jan Tregarron's office were a flat-topped desk and a few chairs. Tregarron sat behind the desk, the top of which was completely bare. He looked almost bored, except that his little eyes were smiling. Jorj Helmuth sat across the desk from him, a few feet back, erect and grim-faced, while shadowy in the muted light, Caddy stood against the wall behind Tregarron. She still wore the fur-trimmed skylon frock she'd put on that afternoon. She took no part in the conversation, seemed almost unaware of it.

"So you just went ahead and canceled the conference without consulting me?" Jorj was saying.

"You called it without consulting me." Tregarron playfully wagged a finger. "Shouldn't do that sort of thing, Jorj."

"But I tell you I was completely prepared. I was absolutely sure of my ground."

"I know, I know," Tregarron said lightly. "But it's not the right time for it. I'm the best judge of that."

"When will be the right time?"

Tregarron shrugged. "Look here, Jorj," he said, "every man should stick to his trade, to his forte. Technology isn't ours."

Jorj's lips thinned. "But you know as well as I do that we are going to have to have a nuclear spaceship and actually go to Mars someday."

Tregarron lifted his eyebrows. "Are we?"

"Yes! Just as we're going to have to build a real Maizie. Everything we've done until now have been emergency measures."

"Really?"

Jorj stared at him. "Look here, Jan," he said, gripping his knees with his hands, "you and I are going to have to talk things through."

"Are you quite sure of that?" Jan's voice was very cool. "I have a feeling that it might be best if you said nothing and accepted things as they are."

"No!"

"Very well." Tregarron settled himself in his chair.

"I helped you organize the Thinkers," Jorj said, and waited. "At least, I was your first partner."

Tregarron barely nodded.

"Our basic idea was that the time had come to apply science to the life of man on a large scale, to live rationally and realistically. The only things holding the world back from this all-important step were the ignorance, superstition, and inertia of the average man, and the

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stuffiness and lack of enterprise of the academic scientists—their worship of facts, even when facts were clearly dangerous.

"Yet we knew that in their deepest hearts the average man and the professionals were both on our side. They wanted the new world visualized by science. They wanted the simplifications and conveniences, the glorious adventures of the human mind and body. They wanted the trips to Mars and into the depths of the human psyche, they wanted the robots and the thinking machines. All they lacked was the nerve to take the first big step—and that was what we supplied.

"It was no time for half measures, for slow and sober plodding. The world was racked by wars and neurosis, in danger of falling into the foulest hands. What was needed was a tremendous and thrilling appeal to the human imagination, an Earth-shaking affirmation of the power of science for good.

"But the men who provided that appeal and affirmation couldn't afford to be cautious. They wouldn't check and double check. They couldn't wait for the grudging and jealous approval of the professionals. They had to use stunts, tricks, fakes—*anything to get over the big point.* Once that had been done, once mankind was headed down the new road, it would be easy enough to give the average man the necessary degree of insight to heal the breach with the professionals, to make good in actuality what had been made good only in pretense.

"Have I stated our position fairly?"

TREGARRON'S eyes were hooded. "You're the one who's telling it."

"On those general assumptions we established our hold on susceptible leaders and the mob," Jorj went on. "We built Maizie and *the Mars rocket and the Mind* Bomb. We discovered the wisdom of the Martians. We *sold* the people on the science that the professionals had been too high-toned to advertise or bring into the market place.

"But now that we've succeeded, now that we've made the big point, now that Maizie and Mars and science do rule the average human imagination, the time has come to take the second big step, to let accomplishment catch up with imagination, to implement fantasy with fact.

"Do you suppose I'd ever have gone into this with you, if it hadn't been for the thought of that second big step? Why, I'd have felt dirty and cheap, a mere charlatan—except for the sure conviction that someday everything would be set right. I've devoted my whole life to that conviction, Jan. I've studied and disciplined myself, using every scientific means at my disposal, so that I wouldn't be found lacking

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when the day came to heal the breach between the Thinkers and the professionals. I've trained myself to be the perfect liaison man for the job.

"Jan, the day's come and I'm the man. I know you've been concentrating on other aspects of our work; you haven't had time to keep up with my side of it. But I'm sure that as soon as you see how carefully I've prepared myself, how completely practical the neutron-drive rocket project is, you'll beg me to go ahead!"

Tregarron smiled at the ceiling for a moment. "Your general idea isn't so bad, Jorj, but your time scale is out of whack and your judgment is a joke. Oh, yes. Every revolutionary wants to see the big change take place in his lifetime. Tcha! It's as if he were watching evolutionary vaudeville and wanted the Ape-to-Man Act over in twenty minutes.

"Time for the second big step? Jorj, the average man's exactly what he was ten years ago, except that he's got a new god. More than ever he thinks of Mars as a Hollywood paradise, with wise men and yummy princesses. Maizie is Mama magnified a million times. As for professional scientists, they're more jealous and stuffy than ever. All they'd like to do is turn the clock back to a genteel dream world of quiet quadrangles and caps and gowns, where every commoner bows to the passing scholar.

"Maybe in ten thousand years we'll be ready for the second big step. Maybe. Meanwhile, as should be, the clever will rule the stupid for their own good. The realists will rule the dreamers. Those with free hands will rule those who have deliberately handcuffed themselves with taboos.

"Secondly, your judgment. Did you actually think you could have bossed those professionals, kept your mental footing in the intellectual melee? You a nuclear physicist? A rocket scientist? Why, it's—Take it easy now, boy, and listen to me. They'd have torn you to pieces in twenty minutes and glad of the chance! You baffle me, Jorj. You know that Maizie and the Mars rocket and all that are fakes, yet you believe in your somno-learning and consciousness-expansion and optimism-pumping like the veriest yokel. I wouldn't be surprised to hear you'd taken up ESP and hypnotism. I think you should take stock of yourself and get a new slant. It's overdue."

HE LEANED back. Jorj's face had become a mask. His eyes did not flicker from Tregarron's, yet there was a subtle change in his expression. Behind Tregarron, Caddy swayed as if in a sudden gust of intangible wind and took a silent step forward from the wall.

"That's your honest opinion?" Jorj asked, very quietly.

"It's more than that," Tregarron

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told him, just as unmelodramatically. "It's orders."

Jorj stood up purposefully. "Very well," he said. "In that case I have to tell you that—"

Casually, but with no waste motion, Tregarron slipped an ultrasonic pistol from under the desk and laid it on the empty top.

"No," he said, "let me tell you something. I was afraid this would happen and I made preparations. If you've studied your Nazi, Fascist and Soviet history, you know what happens to old revolutionaries who don't move with the times. But I'm not going to be too harsh. I have a couple of the boys waiting outside. They'll take you by 'copter to the field, then by jet to New Mex. Bright and early tomorrow morning, Jorj, you're leaving on a trip to Mars."

Jorj hardly reacted to the words. Caddy was two steps nearer Tregarron.

"I decided Mars would be the best place for you," the fat man continued. "The robot controls will be arranged so that your 'visit' to Mars lasts two years. Perhaps in that time you will have learned wisdom, such as realizing that the big liar must never fall for his own big lie.

"Meanwhile, there will have to be a replacement for you. I have in mind a person who may prove peculiarly worthy to occupy your position, with all its perquisites. A person who seems to understand that force and desire are the motive powers of life, and that anyone who believes the big lie proves himself strictly a jerk."

CADDY was standing behind Tregarron now, her half-closed, sleepy eyes fixed on Jorj's.

"His name is Willard Farquar. You see, I too believe in cooperating with the scientists, Jorj, but by subversion rather than conference. My idea is to offer the hand of friendship to a selected few of them—the hand of friendship with a nice big bribe in it." He smiled. "You were a good man, Jorj, for the early days, when we needed a publicist with catchy ideas about Mind Bombs, ray guns, plastic helmets, fancy sweaters, space brassieres, and all that other corn. Now we can afford a soldier."

Jorj moistened his lips.

"We'll have a neat explanation of what's happened to you. Callers will be informed that you've gone on an extended visit to imbibe the wisdom of the Martians."

Jorj whispered, "Caddums."

Caddy leaned forward. Her arms snaked down Tregarron's, as if to imprison his wrists. But instead she reached out and took the ultrasonic pistol and put it in Tregarron's right hand. Then she looked up at Jorj with eyes that were very bright.

She said very sweetly and sympathetically, "Poor Superman."

—FRITZ LEIBER

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